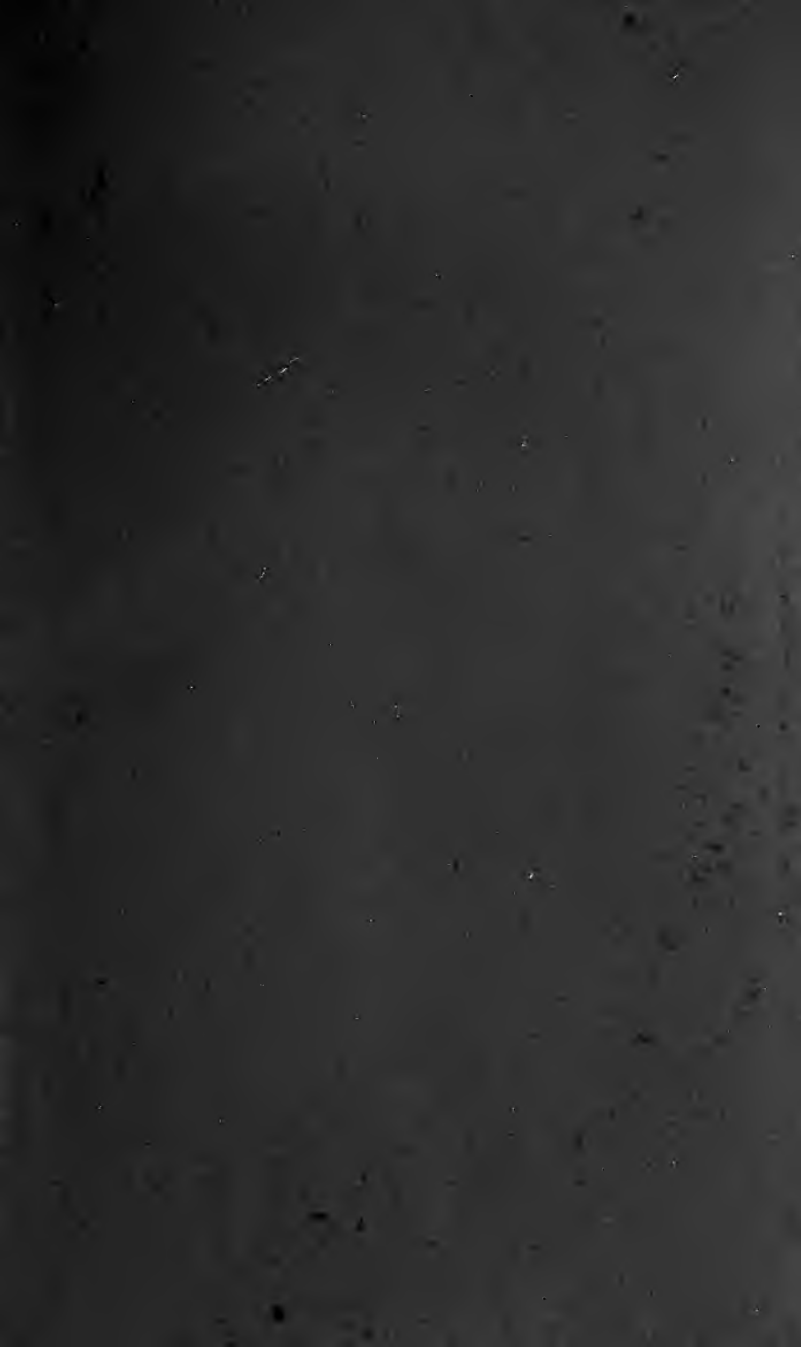
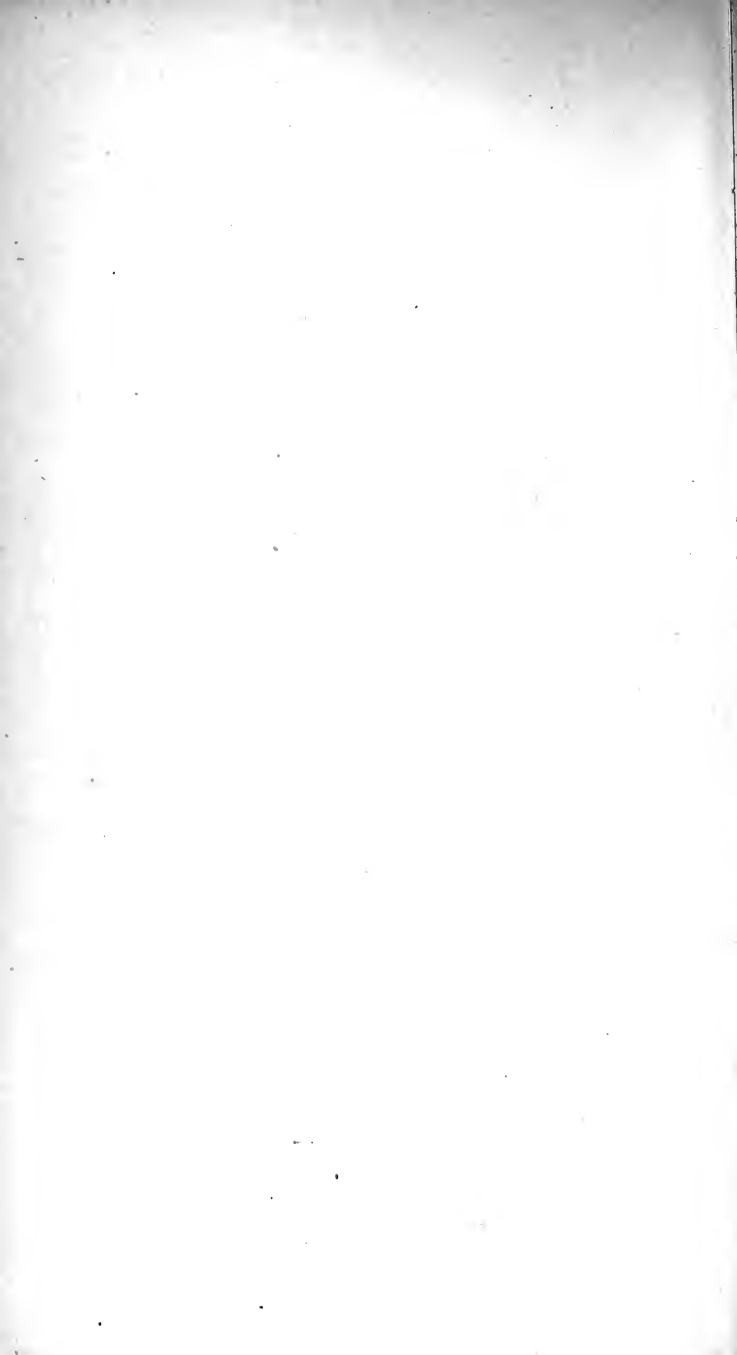


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THE BLUE RIBBON.

VOL. III.

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THE BLUE RIBBON.

BY

THE AUTHOR OF

“ST. OLAVE’S,” “JANITA’S CROSS,”

&c. &c.

“ . . . She enjoys true peace for evermore,
As weather-beaten ship arrived on happy shore.”

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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THE BLUE RIBBON.

CHAPTER I.

THERE was stillness in the little house at Bishop's Lane end; that strange stillness which comes when the actual, visible presence of death has been removed. They had taken Mrs. Monkeston away to bury her by her husband's side in the old churchyard at the Willowmarshes—taken her with but little funeral pomp and circumstance; for love, which reaches out into the other life, needs not such things. And now the brother and sister sat together, looking forth into the grey dawnlight of their quiet future.

Mrs. Bratchet had come to help. She

and Gurtha were washing up and putting away in the kitchen. It was like that other day, more than ten years before, when Ralph Monkeston had been carried to his burial; only that now, instead of the sunny pleasantness of the old farm-garden, the women looked out upon the grey Minster towers of Cruxborough; and for the little children who loitered over their "bolonge" on the grass plot outside, two mourners, one with a man's gravity, the other with a woman's tenderness, remembered their dead.

"There's been a vast o' change, honey," said Mrs. Bratchet, "since you and me did this work afore in yon place at the Willow-marshes. The missis has had a rough carrying on, but she's safe landed now."

"Ay, please the Lord we go as quiet at the last, I wouldn't ask no more. There's nought like a good conscience to die upon. Miss Jean bears up wonderful; that's always the way with the women. She goes about

as mild and quiet-like, with never a breaking out or flinging up the Almighty's ways at Him, as she's a pattern to the believers."

"I don't see as Mr. Roger takes it much different, for that matter," said Mrs. Bratchet, who always liked to put in a word for the young man. "He couldn't bear it more proper not if he were a joined member."

"Maybe it's a word in season to him. He's stood need of one this good bit past, and him took up with them musicianing ways so as he'd never no thought for nothing, else. I've said I'd let on to him as such like things wasn't to profit, but a better'n me has done it now."

"It were that young woman set him on a good deal. There's no telling what she might ha' done with him, if she hadn't took herself off that way, as I can't square it up to myself yet—no, nor ever shall. I'm an old woman, but I've got my two eyes, for all that; and it wasn't for nothing Master

Roger come home with her night after night from them there practisings. He's none the young man to do that way when he doesn't mean anything. I'd used to think it would ha' been a good thing for 'em both, for young people is best settled; and there was a time when she would ha' made him as good a wife as ever stepped, and Mrs. Monkeston, bless her, never the woman to look to high things for her childer. But it's a mercy now he didn't get her. I'll never trusten fair looks and pleasant ways again—no, not while I'm a living woman."

"Ay," said Gurtha, who, being somewhat ill-favoured herself, liked a side-hit at beauty, "I never set much store myself by them pink and white wenches as looks up into your face like lambs, and makes believe they don't know nothing. Mostly they knows a vast more nor what you might think they do. They're as sly as sly, for

all their meek behaviours. You and me never set ourselves up with them sort of ways, Mrs. Bratchet."

"Well, maybe not," said Mrs. Bratchet, with a private mental reservation for the days, more than forty years back now, when she was as fond of a flowered print as anybody, and perhaps won a little of her old man's love with that fondness, too. "I've heard say plain faces goes easiest to heaven, but I could almost have took my Bible oath she were set that road, for such modest ways as she had with her, and never setting herself off to be stared at, as it's such a many of 'em does it now-a-days. I reckon I shall have to look up a bit o' fresh washing, unless I put a paper in the window for a lodger, which I don't much mind, being, as they mostly are, a queer sort. I don't misdoubt but poor Dan'l's wife, as Patch lodged with, thinks the same. You haven't, maybe, heard tell of that, have you?"

Gurtha had not, and signified her willingness to be made wise. Mrs. Bratchet put her dish-cloth on one side, such deference being the least that could be paid to a story so important as the one she was going to relate ; and she seated herself by the fire, and crossed her arms, and paused for a moment, with the grave leisureliness of a woman who knows she has something to say.

“She come to me just a week ago this very night, as I were set minding the shop, after the poor missis was took for her death, and she says to me, ‘Mrs. Bratchet,’ says she, ‘here’s the money,’ for you know she’d been taking home a few o’ clothes, as she oft did it when I was that throng I couldn’t see to ’em myself; and says I to her, ‘Never heed the bit o’ money while morning, honey,’ for I owed her a matter of a shilling or two myself, and I thought we would settle all up at once ; and I axed her to go and take a message for me to the

‘Cruxborough Arms,’ and she off, and I’ve never set eyes on her since, no, nor ever shall, to my thinking, nor the money neither, for she’s took off somewheres, and them as wants her may find her, if they can.”

“Law ! Mrs. Bratchet, you don’t go for to say it !” And now Gurtha left her domestic avocations too, for Patch’s mysterious disappearance required the undivided attention of them both.

“That’s right, honey, put your work by a bit,” said Mrs. Bratchet, “and let’s have our talk comfortable. There’ll be time enough to side things, when I’ve got you told. Well, I looked for her to come next morning, but there was never no signs of it, and then, thinks I, I’ll wait while the Festival’s over, —she’s always on the loose, is Patch, when there’s a bit o’ music going ; and then, you see, the poor missis being took, and that, put it out of my head, and I never thought no more about it while last night, and then

I says to myself, when she didn't come, 'I'll go to Dan'l's wife, and see what's matter,' for I was feared she might ha' fallen ill, and be prowling round i' the dark, like a wild thing, and never taking no heed of cold, nor damp, nor nothing. So I goes to Mrs. Oller right away, and she said Patch had took off a week afore, same train as Dan'l goes guard with. She went after it while as far as the shunting, and begged and prayed him to let her in, while he couldn't frame to say her nay. And that scared, he said, she looked, you might ha' thought she was fleeing the police, and like enough too, with my fifteen-and-sixpence in her pocket, as she knows I slave hard enough for every penny I can addle, the baggage! It's a good thing she didn't go to the Residence and all, for it's well on to a pound a week I take there when the family's in, and she'd have got it, as sure as a gun!"

Gurtha listened open-mouthed, with that

keen appetite which, even in the best regulated minds, feeds with a sort of relish on the evil doings of other people, and finds the diet assimilate comfortably, too.

“Well, to think! But she’s a furriner, and I never had no trust in ’em. Folks is best in their own country. I can’t abide ’em coming here with their odd ways, and turning their words upside down, while there isn’t a bit of sense to get hold of. If they’ve aught to say, why don’t they say it plain, and then I’ll believe them, but not till. Such rubbish backardsing and forradsing when plain English ’ud do it a vast better. And the fifteen-and-sixpence gone too. Law! Mrs Bratchet, but if I was you I’d take it out of her someways.”

“Nay, honey, it’s no use sending good money after bad. I must make shift to do without that check shawl I were laying up for this Chresamus. It’s the music’s done it, I’ll warrant. Patch were allers a fidget

when there was a bit of anything going, but never so bad as this time. It lies strong upon my mind as she once addled her living that way, and it kind o' sticks to her. You know she was singing afore his house when old Hiram seed her and took her in."

That mention of old Hiram reminded Mrs. Bratchet of another subject which she had been intending for some weeks to talk over with Gurtha. She had had it on her mind ever since that conversation with Patch over the ironing-board, but a convenient season had never occurred for the ventilation of it until now.

"I reckon the shop 'll be give up," she began, by way of introduction. "Miss Jean, bless her! ain't got no strength to mind it; and maybe it'll happen as there's a bit of something put by for her to turn round upon."

"I don't know nothing about that," said Gurtha, stiffly; "I never ask no questions.

But it don't look much like anything put by, when Miss Jean's set from morning to night over that there carving, scarce ever giving herself a bit of rest, and never no company, nor a sixpence spent but what there's a need to. It don't make no difference to me, though ; I mean to stay with 'em. It's been a good home to me, and I'll none turn my back of it now the missis is gone. I'd make shift to mind the shop myself, half days, afore it should be give up, if Miss Jean stands need of it."

" Ay, honey, and I'd take the t'other half when I could get the washing cleared out time enough. But there is them that says Mrs. Monkeston oughtn't to be so bad off as what she is. It were Patch herself telled me so, and Patch isn't a woman to let her tongue loose when there's a call to keep it still ; I will say that for her, for all she did me a bad turn about the money. You know she were living servant to old Hiram when

he died, and she told me that he'd been drinking pretty fairish one night about a week afore, and when she come in to take away, he said he'd been making it up to Ralph Monkeston as much as money could do it, and Mr. Ballinger had a say in it some way. And I telled her it were all a make-up, for there's many a man does a good turn when he's in his cups, and it never comes to nothing more. But she stuck to it as she was right, and she wouldn't have it but what the money was put out that way. And then, says I, I'll ask the missis, for there's nought like opening a thing out right away when you want to see to the end of it. And the missis she said it were all a mistake, and she kind o' made me understand, as you know she had that sort of way with her, as I shouldn't meddle in it no more, which I didn't ; not but what I had my own thoughts all the same, as it stands to reason I couldn't stop 'em. And if the missis, bless her!

didn't get it, I'd like to know who did—that's all."

"He's kep' it from her, Mrs. Bratchet, that's what he's done, I lay anything. And a likely man for it, too, by what people say, for you don't go nowhere but what you hear 'em wondering where the money comes from, and them living like princes, as they've been doing it ever since the young lady got up, and their dinners, and their parties, and their dances; I'd thank anybody to tell me what they do it with, that's all. And what for did they stop coming of a sudden after the missis got settled here, if there wasn't summut wrong?—and them feeding theirselves as they'd used to at the farm, and never went away but what they took anything as come handy for the missis to give 'em. It's here, Mrs. Bratchet, if you and me lives long enough, I lay we'll find out it's a pool as don't do to be stirred down to the bottom. While things is kep' quiet,

they go easy, but once give 'em a shake, and you'll see."

"And now I reckon we'd best finish that there washing-up. Miss Jean likes the kitchen cleared afore night, and it's getting on for that."

CHAPTER II.

THE soft, silent wing of death, closing over Roger and Jean Monkeston, kept them for awhile in a solitude into which the busy tongue of gossip could not pierce ; but with the drawn-up blinds other light than that of the sun entered.

Kind little Mr. Grant was the first to come, with some more definite information about Gretchen than Mrs. Bratchet, turbulent and indignant, had been able to gather. Madame had sent for him the day before she left Cruxborough, and had explained everything to him satisfactorily ; at least, so far as anything could be satisfactory in which, after all was said and done, there still remained that quite unexplainable

residuum of selfish indifference on Gretchen's part.

It was such a very fine opening for the young girl, she said—such a very fine opening; and as the Signor Notturino had been willing to take all the trouble into his own hands, even also to bear the expense of her journey to Naples, and to superintend her musical education there, it seemed a pity to let the opportunity slip; though Madame was quite ready to allow that the sudden departure must have seemed strange to her friends. But Gretchen had left kind remembrances and regrets, especially for the excellent Kapellmeister, who had been the first to take notice of her; and she hoped at some future period to be able to inform him of her success in the art to which she had devoted herself.

“It doesn't ring true somehow,” said Mr. Grant, giving himself a little impatient shake when he had ended his account of the

interview with Madame Fortebracchio. "I'm afraid I have been deceived in Gretchen Müller, unless there has been any motive in hurrying her away so suddenly. They may want to get her entirely out of our hands, and then they would make an agreement with her that whatever she earned afterwards should be shared with them. I believe that is often the way with these young singers, who are picked up promiscuously, and educated at the expense of patrons. I could have taught her plenty more myself, though, before she needed to go to Naples. Indeed, she might have had a very good position in the English musical world, without ever going there at all."

"I suppose we must let her go," said Jean, who did not care to plunge poor Gretchen still further into disgrace by telling how she had already behaved to them. "She has chosen her own way—or, at any rate, has had it chosen for her, which does

not always come to the same thing. I dare say Madame does not wish any further communication."

"No, I don't think that, for she gave me her London address, and seemed quite willing that any of us should write. I can't say I like having my little pupil taken out of my hands in this way. I had no idea, when I brought her up to be smiled upon by the *prima donna*, that things would go on at such railway speed. But she will probably stay in town two or three months before they take her on to Naples; and I have been thinking, Miss Monkeston, that perhaps you would write to her. She may feel that she has behaved rather queerly to us all, and so doesn't like to put herself in our way again—at least, that is how I should feel if I had done the same thing. Should you mind the trouble? I know she always thought a great deal about you, and I really

should very much like to know how things are going with her."

Jean promised. Next day she wrote a long letter to Gretchen. She made no reference to the cold message which Roger had received. Possibly there might have been some misunderstanding even in that. She only assumed that the girl had gone away in great haste; and she therefore expressed neither surprise nor offence, only the sorrow which they felt at losing her. Then she told the short and sad story of their mother's death—Madame with the good, grave face, whom Gretchen had loved so much. That surely would win some word of tender regret in reply, even if the living had ceased now to be much cared for.

The letter was duly received by Madame, who of course concluded that it should be forwarded to Gretchen's home in Stuttgart, and gave it to the Signor Notturino—who had wished to be informed of any letters

that might come to her—for that purpose. He took it away, read it, and burned it. Some day, when he had satisfied himself that Patch was safely out of the way, he meant to go to Stuttgart, and look upon the little blue-eyed peasant-girl again. It were as well, therefore, she should not be troubled with remembrances from these other “friends whom I love.”

“I am afraid we must give it up now,” said Mr. Grant, when, after many days, Jean’s letter still remained unanswered. “It is not what I should have thought of little Gretchen Müller, but it will teach me a lesson not to be quite so ready again in taking up people who seem to want some one to help them. I won’t put myself in the way of being treated like this easily another time.”

“Nay, Mr. Grant,” said Jean, “it is for art that you do it. If Gretchen is to be a great singer, we must let her go—it is

better so. You have helped her to that?"

"Yes, and helped her to forget us all; so she has lost as much in her affections as she has gained in her art. Some of these days, I suppose she will be coming back to us with as many airs as Madame herself, and we shall have her bowing in white satin and diamonds to an admiring public. Ah! well, catch me helping to applaud, that's all. I'll do the hissing with a great deal more good-will."

And Mr. Grant bustled away, pulling at his grey whiskers, as he always did when he was in a bad temper.

Jean thought long and earnestly after he had gone. Yes, it was too true now; they must give her up. Yet the more she thought of it, the more it seemed unlike Gretchen. She remembered the morning—it was only a month ago, but it seemed much more like a year—when the little German girl had come to them to be ready

for the Festival, and they had sat together in her own little room upstairs, and she had talked to Gretchen about coming to live with them. And the girl's face had brightened up so at the thought; her whole heart seemed to meet it so joyously. There had been no holding back, no reserve of half-uncertainty. And Gretchen could not counterfeit. Those clear blue eyes of hers told all the truth. That innocent face was the very mirror of her thoughts. And just one day later she was gone—gone without a word or a message—gone so far from them that even the sad story of death, and sorrow, and remembrance could not win so much as one word of reply from her when she heard it. And this was Gretchen Müller—Gretchen, whom Roger loved, upon whom he had set his hope, whom he thought one day to have called by the sweet name of wife.

“But he will arise and forget,” said Jean

to herself, as she looked out into brighter years for him ; years in which, since this peasant-girl loved him not, he should win for himself some white-handed bride, and set her by his side amongst the great people who should one day give him place. "He will arise and forget."

And so it might seem he did ; for in those long Winter evenings which came and went after Mrs. Monkeston's death, there was never any word spoken of Gretchen. She seemed farther from them, much farther now, than the mother who, in her strong, faithful love, could never, living or dying, be lost. Bravely, steadily, Roger worked on, winning much praise from his friend and master. And if his face looked sometimes a little sterner than usual, it was the thought of his mother which cast a shadow there ; how should he smile, and the grass not green upon her grave ?

CHAPTER III.

MR. ARNCLIFFE did his business in London, read his paper before the Royal Society, went to Paris on some affairs connected with the great telescope, was made a corresponding member of the Academy there, returned to London, dipped into half-a-dozen scientific gatherings, met a few lords and dukes who had leanings in his own directions, had two or three fresh letters added to the train which already followed his name, and then came back to Cruxborough, to subside into the insignificance which that most discerning of cities had long ago indicated as his portion.

He spent one quiet evening with Jean and Roger, though, before he took to

work again in the little office. People were mistaken who thought Matthew Arncliffe a man of science, and nothing more than that. Far down in the heart of him there lay a true sympathy for those who suffered—sympathy which could struggle sometimes into most tender speech, or, failing that, tell itself in deeds of kindly helpfulness. The old astronomer was something like one of those double stars which he was so fond of observing through his big telescope—apparently a glittering point of light, nothing more than that, but resolving itself, for those who could come near enough to it, into a rich, warm glow of colour, deep, vivid, intense.

After that quiet evening he sat and thought for a long time. Something must be done now for Jean. She must not go on keeping that little shop in the Bishop's Lane end. He must have a talk with Roger about it, and about that other affair, too, which had

been puzzling him so ever since his journey to London.

That conversation which he had overheard in the railway-carriage, what did it mean? Had old Hiram Armstrong ever done anything for the Monkestones? From what his nephew had said, and said, too, without any sort of mincing of the matter, there had been a compensation on the old man's part for some injury which he was supposed to have done to Ralph Monkeston; and this compensation, it appeared, took the form of a provision for Roger, sufficient to meet the expenses of his education, and afterwards to place him out in some suitable profession. Now Mr. Arncliffe knew well enough, both from what Dr. Boniface had told him, and from his conversations with Mrs. Monkeston, that Roger's education had been supplied to him without cost in the Cathedral song-school; and he knew well enough, too, that not a penny had ever been

paid to himself in the shape of premium for the lad. What had become of it, then? From what he had seen of Mrs. Monkeston, he did not think she was the sort of woman to make herself seem poorer than she really was, in order to squeeze a little extra charity out of those who were willing to help her. And yet, when he made that offer of taking Roger free of expense, why had she not said that a provision for that purpose had already been made for him? She was gone, poor woman! and he would not judge her harshly; but still, if the thing really were so, it would have been altogether nobler of her to have admitted it. It was obtaining money under false pretences, to trade upon a poverty that really did not exist; and Mrs. Monkeston was the last woman whom he would have suspected of such a meanness.

As for Roger, it was not his fault. Likely enough he knew nothing about it. If the money had been given into his mother's

hands for one purpose, and she, finding that purpose could be equally well answered by the generosity of a second friend, had put it into the business, or laid it by as a possible provision for the other child, she would not be likely to say anything about it. But still the matter ought to be cleared up, especially now that Roger's help in the Woolsthorpe works was so valuable, and that the time had come for his position there to be permanently raised. If the money were there, the disposition of affairs consequent upon Mrs. Monkeston's death would bring it to light, and then nothing more should be done for Roger, until that sum had been invested for the benefit of his sister. Jean once made secure from want, then the other question of salary or partnership might be discussed.

Accordingly Mr. Arncliffe sent for the young man to come to him in the little inner office, one evening, after the men had left.

“Clear out those wheels,” he said cheerily, as Roger came in, “and make a place for yourself. I want to have a bit of talk with you. I thought we had better be to ourselves here, or I would have come over to Bishop’s Lane. You’ve nothing particular going on to-night, I hope.”

“No, sir,” said Roger, taking his seat in the place previously occupied by the dismembered portions of a chronometer. “I am quite at liberty for anything you may want me for.”

“Calculations, most likely,” thought Roger. This great telescope took as much getting through as an act of Parliament. And the grinding of the huge lenses was not even begun yet. But Mr. Arncliffe’s opening words put him on a different track.

“Now, Roger, you and I have gone along smoothly enough for the last eleven years, and I’m not the man to make light of what you’ve done, or what is in you to do yet. I

don't want to cheapen your abilities, in order to get more work out of you for less money."

"You have never done that yet, sir," said Roger, the colour rising in his grave, thoughtful young face. "You have always given me credit for as much as ever I deserved."

"Well, well, I've only done my duty, then, that's all. And I told you, you know, some months ago, when we got that order from Paris placed to the works, that I would take you as far as you could go in this sort of thing. Now, it didn't occur to me then, but I'm bound to say it has occurred to me since, that perhaps you may be able to go farther than I can take you—eh?"

"I'll go as far as I can, sir," said Roger, "but I shall never go beyond you; I am quite sure of that."

"Are you? Well, all I can say is this—you are very much farther now than I was

twenty years ago; and if you keep on doing your best—mind, I say doing your best—you'll stand in twenty years' time where I shall never reach. That's about the truth of it. But before we say anything more about salary, and that sort of thing, there's one little matter I want to talk over with you. It's no use making any bones about it; but I daresay you know well enough I took you in here without any premium, which isn't a thing I generally do; for the sort of training a lad gets under my care isn't what many men in England could give him."

"I know that, sir," said Roger. "My mother often told me how good you had been to take me free of expense."

"She did, eh? Ah! well, I didn't know—thought perhaps it might be different. It's all right, then, so far. I did it because I thought you couldn't afford the couple of hundred pounds or so that it would have

cost in a regular way. And I've never repented it since, Roger, never."

"And you never shall, sir, if I can help it."

"I don't suppose I shall. And now I've been thinking I should like to give you a share in the concern, so that you may feel you belong to it in a manner; and when anything happens to me, for I'm getting an old man now, I shall feel that the reputation of the place will be kept up. But I happened to hear of something the other day that staggered me a little, and I may as well out with it at once. When I was going up to London to read that paper of mine, Armstrong of Wastewood was in the same carriage, talking to another gentleman. They neither of them knew who I was, and I didn't care for their talk at first; but when he hears his own name mentioned, a man has a right to listen, and that's what I did."

"Yes, sir," said Roger, as Mr. Arncliffe

looked keenly at him. But the clear, honest eyes never faltered in their straightforward glance ; and Mr. Arncliffe went on :

“ Armstrong said that his uncle, old Hiram of Wastewood, paid down a sum of money, as compensation for an injury of some sort that he had done to your father, and the money was intended for your education and for any premium which might be required for putting you out in life. Then the other man, whoever he might be, said he had been very much surprised when Mrs. Monkeston, whom he seemed to know something about,—traveller in small wares, or something of that sort,—when Mrs. Monkeston articulated you to me, because a concern like this requires a good deal of capital to carry it on ; but if the money had been provided for you, why, that explained it.”

Again that keen look at Roger, met again by the same clear, conscious truthfulness.

“Now, Roger, you know as well as I do, it seems, that never a penny came to me in the way of premium or any other way. What I have done for you has been done out of my own free will, and because I saw there was the stuff in you to make a man of science, and it isn't any money of yours that I care about, or that I would take now, if you offered it to me. But before this business about the partnership goes any farther, I want to say something to you. If this money was ever paid into your mother's hands, or laid up in any way in your family, I should wish it to be invested now for the use of your sister Jean, that she may have a little something independent of yourself. You can do more in the world than she can, and it is only right it should be made up to her in some way.”

“It is, sir,” said Roger, with a proud sadness in his tones; “and since our mother died, I have arranged that the fifty pounds

a year which she had of her own when she married my father, should be settled upon Jean. I don't want it; I would rather work myself. But our mother never had anything more than that. There was never any money paid into her hands that I know of; we have no papers or receipts relating to it. All that we had my mother worked for; and worked hard, too," Roger added, turning away, that Mr. Arncliffe might not see the tears in his eyes as he thought of the quiet, strong woman who bore so patiently her long years of toil.

Mr. Arncliffe looked puzzled. He reached across and grasped Roger's hand.

"I can't make it out; but you've been a good lad to your sister, anyway, and I respect you for it. You'll never need to repent that. And I'm glad your mother didn't know,—didn't know about the money, I mean. It's a curious thing. There's some hitch somewhere that I can't make out. I

don't know this Mr. Armstrong, and I don't want to bother him about it until I've a little more ground to stand upon. You'd better talk it over with your sister. She has a clear head for most things. Whatever goes into that mill will come out well ground, I know; and, between you, you must make out what you can. That's where the thing stops now, and we shan't be able to get on much further in the other matter until it's cleared out of the way. I don't think I'll keep you any longer now. Just help me down, though, with that great lens before you go."

"Splendid piece of glass!" he said, smoothing it gently with his hand, as a father might stroke the cheek of his youngest-born. "I don't suppose there's such another in the world. And when we've made it all that it can be made, Roger——"

And the old man's face lighted up, and the keen grey eyes sparkled, as he realised the glorious possibilities only waiting there for touch of his skill to awaken. After all, life was a grand thing, and he had used it to some purpose.

Roger went away. After awhile Mr. Arncliffe turned to his chair by the fire, pushed up his spectacles, and fell to thinking.

"There's something gone crooked there," he said to himself; "but the little lassie with the great forehead will put it straight. Those clear eyes of hers look right into things."

Then there was a long spell of silence—silence in which no subtle problem of optical science had been thought out, or calculation worked to a successful end.

"What a foolish old man I am!" said the great astronomer at last; "as if it could ever have been of any use!"

For not many weeks before he had asked the "little brown-faced hunchback" to be his wife, and, with the tears in her eyes, she had said him nay.

CHAPTER IV.

ROGER came home and told his sister all about it. His spirit rose within him at the thought that he could have taken Mr. Arncliffe's kindness, and been a pensioner upon his charity, while all the time the money which should have rendered him independent of it had been laid up. The reflection, too, upon his mother galled him to the quick. Did Mr. Arncliffe, then, think—had he been thinking all these years—that Mrs. Monkeston had sponged upon a generosity to which she had no right—which, in common honesty, she ought to have put aside? He felt that he could not look his employer in the face again until

this matter had been cleared up, his own and his mother's clean-handed poverty proved beyond a doubt.

Jean was not so surprised. She had a dim remembrance of Mrs. Bratchet's story, though the quick rush of events since then had prevented her from much dwelling upon it. She remembered, too, the quiet resolve of her mother's tones.

"I wish it never mentioned again."

It never had been mentioned again. But whether there was any foundation for the story, whether the money had been offered and refused, or never offered at all, she could not tell. The whole affair most likely belonged to those sad years of which Mrs. Monkeston so rarely spoke, years in which she had borne the burden of their father's slow wreck and ruin, and borne it so bravely, too. Little wonder that she laid it from her when chance gossip brought it to the surface again.

But it must not be laid away now. Jean sent for Mrs. Bratchet, and bade her tell what she could remember of the circumstances.

“It’s just here,” said the good woman, delighted to have an opportunity of launching out at last into the subject which had always been such a mystery to her, but which she had never dared to mention again since Mrs. Monkeston’s quiet dismissal of it, five or six months ago. “It’s here, Miss Jean. Patch and me was set talking a bit afore the Festival, as she’s never handed up since, no, nor don’t mean to, by appearances, for there’s nobody, to my knowledge, ever set eyes on her again, and that fifteen and sixpence of mine, which I’d broiled and toiled for it, took off as I say it’s a burning shame, and me a lone woman this thirty year since my old man died, with the stationed minister to see him reg’lar, and the Sacrament and all proper, as if he’d belonged

to one of the front pews theirselves he couldn't have been better done to. And I was a telling of her, Miss Jean, how your poor dear mother, bless her, had offered for yonder young woman as Madame sent away, to come and stop with you, which I'll stick to it she'd ought to ha' known better nor to have done such'n a thing, and me the mother to her I've been ever since she come to the house, and always her meals reg'lar to the minnit, as I couldn't have laid myself out for it more if she'd been my very own; but I'll never do it again, no, that I won't; and never a word to say how or why; and all her bits of things left about, and her box, as there's many a one's told me it were better sold for the rent, only I'm not a woman as does that sort of way."

"But about this story which Patch told," said Jean, taking advantage of a break in Mrs. Bratchet's harangue to bring her thoughts back to the starting-point.

“Ay, the story, Miss Jean, and that’s what I were coming to, and a good turn of your poor dear mother, too, as she’d offered to do the girl, and I overed it again and again to Patch, as it wasn’t a woman in a thousand would have done it, and Mrs. Monkeston not to call rich as you may say, which isn’t the least manner of offence, Miss Jean, begging your pardon, for there’s a many poor enough in this world as is rich in the Kingdom of Grace, and their reward laid up for ’em where the moth and rust doesn’t corrupt, and where it won’t be took off with folks going to London by the night-mail, as it’s Dan’l hisself said they both on ’em did. And then Patch, she out with it, and she says to me, ‘Mrs. Bratchet,’ she says, ‘Mrs. Monkeston isn’t that poor as you think,’ and she began of a long story when she lived maid-of-all-work to old Hiram Armstrong of Wastewood, him as was a bad friend to your father, Miss Jean.”

“I know,” said Jean, quietly, and said no more.

“Ay,” continued Mrs. Bratchet, “and I knowed it too, so as she didn’t need to ha’ told me, for many and many’s the time I’ve seed your poor mother set waiting for him wi’ that weary look on her face, when it was nought but old Hiram had him at the ‘Crown and Cushion,’ a-boozing and a-drinking, as merry as crickets, and never no thought o’ them as had the sitting up to do, as it’s always the way of the men. And I said he were a bad un, were old Hiram—ay, and that were he too, Miss Jean, and not a sort that silver and gold could white-wash, for as much as he had of it to roll in. And then Patch, she up and, says she, he wasn’t so bad as a many made him out, for he’d laid down a lot o’ money to even it to your poor father, she said he telled her it his own self, nobbut a week afore he died, one night when she went in to take him his

supper, so that people shouldn't have it to say of him, after he was gone, as he had helped anyone to their ruin. And the money was for the little boy, as I understood it, Miss Jean—Master Roger, you know—so as he should get his larning proper, and be put out to summut respectable when the time come."

"I don't understand how he could have done anything of the sort without my mother's knowledge," said Jean. "We have found no papers referring to it."

"Maybe not, Miss Jean. I'm only telling you as it come to me, and as like as not I've let a good bit slip through, not being as it was my business to stir into it. But now I start to think about it, I mind Patch said Mr. Ballinger had to do with it. Old Hiram had give the money to him, and he was to see as it went right road, and then I up and says, Mrs. Monkeston wouldn't have humbled herself to take it—no, not if

they'd both on 'em gone down of their bended knees to beg and pray of her to, and old Armstrong the nasty varmint he was, as there could never a blessing come along with it; and I didn't believe neither he'd ever as much grace in him as 'ud serve to clear out his pockets for them as he'd wronged, let 'em want it ever so; but Patch, she stuck to it as that was the way, and no other, and nought as I could say made a bit o' difference, for she's a woman, is Patch, Miss Jean, as if she takes hold on a thing, you might as well try to move Cruxborough Minster as make her leave go; and that made me as I couldn't put it off in a manner; only when I seed your poor mother a-working and a-slaving of herself in that there shop, as it stands to reason she wouldn't have done it if there hadn't been a need, and Mr. Roger beginning to feel his feet, as you may say, under him at Mr. Arncliffe's, so as he wasn't to care for so much.

And maybe there's a deal more, if one could only light upon it; but you see, with Patch being gone, and never no knowing where she's took herself to, one has to let it be. Or else I sure she'd a vast more to say."

"And does no one know where she is?" said Jean. "Did she leave no message?"

"No, Miss Jean—leastways, none as I ever heard tell on; and not very likely either, with that fifteen and sixpence of mine a-burning through her pockets, as I hope and trust it will, which isn't unchristian, Miss Jean, I don't think, and me the friend to her I was. And Dan'l's wife 'll bear me witness to it, as it's many and many a time I've sent her home there with a bit o' cold meat lapped up in a cloth, or a drop o' gin, if she'd a pain in her inside, which she was a woman as often had it, and wi' nought but hunger neither; and enjoyed poor health in a general way, which wasn't to wonder at,

for she was that sort as never did credit to her keep, let you give her what you would, and a bad digeshun, too, I warrant. Them furriners mostly has."

And Mrs. Bratchet smoothed her shawl comfortably down over her own digestive apparatus, which had been working on now for more than sixty years, in sublime unconsciousness of its existence, just content with doing its duty, like those happy people who have no history.

"Not as it kep' her, though, from her work," Mrs. Bratchet continued. "I will say that for her. She was a good sort, and never put herself forrads where she wasn't wanted, as there's a many does it now-a-days. And as steady, if it was the men you spoke about, ay, as steady, as Martinet's bank itself, —never went out of her way to look at 'em, nor couldn't abide them as did, and that was how she come to bring the young woman Gretchen to me, Miss Jean. Not as

she was that way inclined, not a bit, for a modester, more well-conducted person you never lighted on, only there was a many coming and going where Patch lodged with her, and when there's a pot o' mignonette set anywhere, it stands to reason folks will find it out, and when they've took it away, why then it's over late to lock your gate, and so Patch axed me if I'd make it so as she could have her home wi' me, being as respectable a woman, though I say it as shouldn't, as you'll find anywhere in Cruxborough, if it's keeping yourself to yourself that's wanted, which it seems to me that's what it is. And I've had my thoughts, too, Miss Jean, if I may speak 'em about that there what's-his-name, as come here with Madame, and took the young woman away. As soon as the Festival began to get agate, she'd used to talk about somebody as she'd knowed out in them parts where she come from, and her mother didn't approve, and

sent her away over here, which she couldn't have done a better thing for her, and him coming and going in that way, which it stands to reason he meant something by it, or ought to do. And it lies strong upon my mind, Miss Jean, not as I could tell nobody the why and the wherefore, but only just I've fixed it so, as this is him, and he's heard tell on her. Maybe it is, and maybe it isn't, as like as not, and I don't know as it matters much, for you'd best let young people go their own way, when they're set on it, and most says Madame's a good sort, so she'll be well took care on. But I'm not a woman as talks," added Mrs. Bratchet, rising complacently, and adjusting her bonnet-strings. And having thus epitomised herself, she made her curtsy, and retired into the kitchen, to have the whole matter over there again from beginning to end with Gurtha.

CHAPTER V.

THAT was a new light upon Gretchen's disappearance, but a light which showed her farther and farther away. Jean remembered now the dim, vague regretfulness with which the girl had spoken of some one at Stuttgart, who had taken an interest in her, and would have made her a great singer, "but my mother willed it not." Was this the same man whom good or evil fortune—who could tell?—had caused to cross her path again, and with whom Madame had bidden her away to make her own place in the world?

Jean wondered much, but said nothing. For Gretchen's name was never spoken now in that house, where once it had been

another word for sunshine; and whether Roger remembered, or whether he forgot, scarce showed itself upon the grave young face, which was beginning to wear the strength of conscious manhood. Jean noticed sometimes a strange look of their mother in his face—that folding of the lips which held back so much, that patient, earnest look, just touched with the pride of independence. It seemed as if he were taking upon himself her place; as if his now should be the care and the toil, which for all those years she had borne so bravely. That new seriousness of life, not any regret or bitterness for the past, Jean thought, told the story of his altered bearing now.

But Mr. Arncliffe must be seen again, and Roger saw him the day after that talk with Mrs. Bratchet. He told him the substance of the old woman's story, the only point on which it gave any light being the mention of Mr. Ballinger's name in connection with

the transfer of the money ; and, as Patch had disappeared, and as Mrs. Bratchet's memory was not very clear, even that was not of much use.

“Patch?—yes. Rather queer thing that,” said Mr. Arncliffe, as he and Roger sat in the inner office after working hours—“very queer thing indeed. She was in the same carriage when I went up to town—came scrambling in like a monkey after we had got to the shunting-station, and then dropped back in her seat as if she would have fainted. I spoke to her as we were getting out, and asked her how it was she had come so far from home ; but she did not seem disposed to be communicative, so I let her alone. She has not turned up again, I suppose?”

“No, and so one of the other women has been put into her place. It is a pity, for she kept the lacquering-room in better order than it had ever been before ; and the worst

of it is, she has gone away in debt. She has taken nearly a pound of poor old Mrs. Bratchet's money, and left her rent unpaid at her lodgings. I thought better of her than that."

"And so did I; but the longer you live in the world the less you know what to think. I'm in the dark now about this Wastewood affair, and I shan't rest until I've cleared it up. I mean to see Ballinger to-morrow, if I can; when I've got something out of him, I'll go to Armstrong, and then, maybe, we shall see to the end of the tunnel. There's been a hitch somewhere, if we could find out where it is."

Mr. Arncliffe was as anxious as Roger could be to set matters straight, and especially since the affair had been complicated by the bringing in of Mr. Ballinger's name, a name by no means synonymous with honour, truth, and straightforwardness—at least, not so in the opinion of the

shrewd old astronomer. Accordingly, he took the earliest opportunity of going to the office in High Street to make his first experiment in boring.

It was his first visit there since that memorable evening, eleven years ago, when Roger was delivered from the initiatory mysteries of the profession. Mr. Ballinger had risen considerably in the world since then. He had beamed over his spectacles at innumerable charity school-meetings, and rehearsed to whole armies of Blue-coat boys the story of his rise and progress in life—a story which was always received as if no one had ever heard it before, when the speaker, applying to his glass of water at a certain point in the narrative, intimated that the pent-up feeling of his audience might now begin to express itself. But of course that little episode about the bank shares was never mentioned as having occurred during the said rise and progress, although, so far

as wealth was concerned, it had really given him his start. Indeed, to do him justice, Mr. Ballinger had almost forgotten the details. Eleven years of hard work, a successful run of speculations, a close application to the duties of his profession, "eventuating," as he liked to say, in one of the best positions in Cruxborough, had well-nigh driven away the memory of that night at Wastewood when he had ventured to question old Hiram's wisdom in the choice of a housekeeper, and that other night, a few weeks later, when he had burned the little scrap of paper which alone stood between him and the undisturbed enjoyment of the shares in Martinet's bank.

And then prosperity, joined with a judicious amount of reserve, makes such a capital hedge round a man's private character, and, if self-esteem is added, the enclosure is complete. The hedge which Mr. Ballinger had, with much pains and trouble, raised round

his own little particular plot of ground was of the closest, most invulnerable sort—thick, well-planted, deeply-rooted, never a chink in it through which the owner of the garden need look to waste lands or uncultivated patches beyond ; or thin place which might afford to passers-by a glimpse of disreputable rubbish-heaps and obnoxious weeds, rotting in obscure corners of the otherwise well-kept little paradise. Ever-green, too, as such hedges should always be, proof against searching east wind of inquiry, blight of discontent, grub of self-examination. As for any sunk fence of retrospection, that miserable device of a landowner for commanding an outlook over his own and other people's property, Mr. Ballinger despised it. What was the use of a garden, if you couldn't keep it to yourself? If you couldn't see over into your neighbour's cornfields without in return giving him the command of your own private rubbish-heaps, why,

better do without the prospect altogether.

The only approach to anything like a gap in Mr. Ballinger's splendid evergreen hedge had threatened it when, eight years after old Hiram's death, Mr. Stanley Armstrong came to the new house at Wastewood. Then there certainly had been signs of a blight in one corner of the enclosure—a corner, too, which closely adjoined a very disreputable rubbish-heap, one which might almost have brought its owner within the provisions of the Public Nuisances Act, if found out. But Mr. Ballinger had been equal to the occasion. He had cut away diseased wood, planted new shoots, manured the ground thoroughly, and put up a temporary screen, until the young foliage had gathered strength. In other words, he had taken precautions to keep Mr. Armstrong entirely out of the way of the Monkestons, which was an easy thing to do, by representing them to him as exceedingly low people—in fact, no sort of

society at all ; and then, worming himself into the man's good graces by unlimited hospitality, hospitality which seemed likely now to have its reward in the elevation of Matilda to the ownership and queendom of Wastewood. And between himself and that quarter from which the east wind occasionally blew, said quarter being occupied by the proprietor of the Woolsthorpe works, he had set out a plantation of distant courteous civility, which formed an admirable shelter from the too close approach of the enemy.

All was now safe, sound, and comfortable. He might walk up and down in perfect peace, sit under the shadow of his own vine and fig-tree, forget his rubbish-heaps entirely, or use them as a compost for bedding-out plants, and so, by the splendid chemistry of worldliness, turn them into the brilliant flowers which might be plucked and displayed to the eyes of an admiring

public. For was not that great house on the Portman Road, with its glare, and its show, and its ostentation, just like a gigantic fungus, which had grown out of the rottenness and foulness of that long-ago transaction with old Hiram Armstrong? But evil days were at hand for the evergreen hedge.

“Good evening, Mr. Ballinger,” said the proprietor of the Woolsthorpe works, going into the little inner office not long before Christmas. “Rather cold, sir. Wind in the east, I fancy—eh?”

“Very cold indeed, sir,” said Mr. Ballinger, buttoning his coat round him, and bowing politely. “Pray be seated. It is not often that I have the pleasure of receiving you in what I may denominate my little sanctum. It is, as you say, very cold—quite a change in the weather.”

“Yes, blows sharp, rather; but we must expect it. Things generally come to their time, don’t they, Mr. Ballinger? The only

way is to get ready for them, and a touch of east in the wind never makes any difference to me. I don't mind it a bit."

Mr. Ballinger shivered slightly. He minded it very much—in fact, there was nothing to which, at the present time, he had a stronger objection, and he said so; then waited for his visitor's errand to be unfolded.

"It's a little matter of business connected with the Monkestones, Mr. Ballinger, that I've come to trouble you about. I may as well tell you I have had a bit of a shake in that direction."

Mr. Ballinger unbuttoned his coat directly. Milder—decidedly milder.

"Quite likely, my dear sir. Indeed, without being understood to say anything which might in the slightest degree militate against your well-known experience in discernment of character, I might venture to hint that for some time past I have been

looking forward to something of this kind—something, I mean, which would occasion a change in your sentiments towards a family for whom I have never myself entertained the unbounded respect which you appear to have felt. Differences of opinion, my dear sir—differences of opinion, you know. But really in some families the bad blood never appears to wear out entirely.”

“Bad blood—yes, that brings me to it, for I expect poor Ralph Monkeston was at the bottom of it. Old Hiram Armstrong was a queer character, but perhaps he had his good qualities after all.”

“Undoubtedly, sir, undoubtedly. In fact, I may say, looking abroad upon the great field of human nature”—here Mr. Ballinger began to assume the platform style, and beam upon an imaginary audience through his spectacles—“the great field of human nature, my dear sir, where do we find mankind without what I may call redeeming

qualities? Even the untutored savage, even the denizens of the lowest abodes of destitution——”

“Yes, yes,” said Mr. Arncliffe, dashing into the midst of the sentence before it reached its climax, “exactly; and I’ve happened to find out that old Hiram tried to do something towards making it up to poor Ralph Monkeston—paid down a sum for the little lad’s education, and for a premium when he wanted putting out into business. Creditable of him, wasn’t it?”

Mr. Ballinger stirred the office fire, rang for the boy to put on more coal. Certainly very cold now for the time of year—almost what might be called a blight in the air for evergreens. Nothing serious yet, though, if vigorous measures were used at once to stop it. A benevolent shake of the head, a gentle smile, a little kindly doubt would set everything straight again.

“Very possibly, sir, very possibly. I

think, now you recall it to my mind, I did once hear of a proposition of that kind—most likely the result of an extra glass of spirit and water. We all know, my dear Mr. Arncliffe, what Hiram Armstrong was. Without the least disrespect to his memory, I think I may be allowed to say that he was a man of good intentions—very good intentions; especially when in the company of congenial associates. But as for anything more than that——”

And bringing the benevolent shake of the head, and the gentle smile into action, Mr. Ballinger dismissed poor old Hiram’s good intentions to what was manifestly their sole purpose—the paving of dangerous roads. Every one knew what men would do—or, at least, what they would promise to do, when warmed by the generous influence of *vieux Cognac*.

Mr. Arncliffe seemed puzzled for a moment, tried to look right into Mr. Ballinger’s

face, but could not, it being bent over some papers which required immediate attention ; then bore down from the inclement quarter with more vigour than before.

“ Yes, Mr. Ballinger, I can understand a man promising to do things, and then forgetting all about them, but I don’t think even old Hiram himself would write out to the colonies, and say he’d done a thing, mind, that he really had *done* it, when it was only a matter of intention. Men don’t usually write letters, except when they are sober.”

Mr. Ballinger buttoned his coat again directly. Letters?—letters?—what did Mr. Arncliffe know about letters? Had the old cattle-dealer been writing to anybody about that affair? Were not his very last words on the subject words of confidence?—“ It’s between you and me, Ballinger, between you and me,” and everything that he had done since had been done upon the assumption that he, and he only, knew the old

man's purpose. Letters were a nuisance! Grub, mildew, blight, anything but wholesome for an evergreen hedge. A screen must be put up at once.

"Excuse me, Mr. Arncliffe, if I am not able to enter upon the subject with you. My recollections are too indistinct to allow me to speak with confidence. As you are aware, my life is one of much public enterprise,—may I add, also, of a philanthropic character?—and involves me in pursuits which incapacitate me for the remembrance of trifles at a distance. In fact, I cannot now charge my memory with the facts to which you allude."

"Perhaps not, Mr. Ballinger, and so I will just run them over to you as I have gathered them up. A few weeks ago, as I was going up to London by the evening train, I overheard a conversation between Mr. Stanley Armstrong, and some one who seemed to be a commercial traveller. At any rate, what-

ever he was, he knew Mrs. Monkeston by going to the shop sometimes, and he expressed his surprise at young Monkeston's being articled to me, on account of the premium, which he supposed must have been considerable. And Mr. Armstrong accounted for it by saying that his uncle, old Hiram of Wastewood, had laid down a certain sum of money, to be used for Roger's education and establishment in business. That was all I heard, and I daresay I shouldn't have heard so much as that, if my own name hadn't been mentioned in it, which of course made me listen with a little more interest."

"Exactly so, my dear sir," said Mr. Balinger, thinking how much more convenient it would have been if his visitor had improved the shining hours of that railway journey in peaceful slumbers, instead of picking up fragments of a conversation which might possibly produce such unpleasant results.

"Now, you know, Ballinger," persisted Mr. Arncliffe, "not a penny has ever been paid to me in the way of premium for Roger. I don't say it to make myself look like a generous man, but simply because it ought to be known to make the case clearer. And as for his education, I know perfectly well that was provided for him free of expense at the Minster school. Dr. Boniface, who has always been a good friend to him, told me that when I first thought of taking him. The question comes up, then, who got the money?"

"I should say," answered Mr. Ballinger, blandly, "that there never was any transaction of the kind you name. It has been a misunderstanding on young Mr. Armstrong's part."

"No, not so. I asked Roger about it, for I always think a thing is better stirred into at once, and he had never heard of any money; but he consulted with his sister, and

a Mrs. Bratchet, who had once come to the house with some obscure sort of story about old Hiram, was sent for. What Mrs. Bratchet says is this, that a woman named Patch—— Do you happen to remember a woman named Patch, Mr. Ballinger?"

Mr. Ballinger was not able to charge his memory with any such name. At least, so he said.

"Well, I don't know that it's much consequence just yet, perhaps you will remember when I begin to recall the facts. This woman, Patch, once lived as servant-housekeeper with old Mr. Armstrong, and he was in the habit of talking to her sometimes about his affairs, as people of that sort do, especially when they are given to drink. And one evening, after you had been sent for to see him, he told this Patch that he had been making an arrangement with you for the benefit of the Monkestones. The interest of some bank shares was to be appropriated

for their use, and you were to have the management of them. That is what the woman said to Mrs. Bratchet. Now, of course, if one had happened accidentally upon such a story, one might have believed it, or not; but tallying so curiously with what I overheard in the railway carriage, it seemed worth looking into."

"May I ask, sir, did Mr. Armstrong mention my name in connection with this affair?"

"Not that I am aware of. You only appear in Mrs. Bratchet's version of the story. And, very unfortunately, the woman Patch, from whom she received it, has disappeared suddenly. Indeed, she travelled to London in the same carriage with me, and has never been heard of since, so that we cannot get any further light from that quarter; but as you were named, I thought I had better come to you before I troubled Armstrong about it."

“Very wise, my dear sir,” answered Mr. Ballinger, who was determined that if he could prevent such a proceeding, Mr. Armstrong should never be troubled about it at all. “I always counsel prudence. It is not advisable to stir up ill-feeling; and with the position that Mr. Armstrong holds in Cruxborough, he would naturally shrink from being reminded of facts so derogatory to his uncle’s character. As for the woman upon whom the chief weight of this evidence rests, I may perhaps be pardoned for doubting the perfect reliability of her testimony. Now that you recall the facts, I certainly have a dim remembrance of the party mentioned—a somewhat irregular character, and, if I may be allowed to express my opinion, of unsound mind.”

“Capital worker, though,” said Mr. Arncliffe, shrewdly. “No unsoundness there. Was over the women in my lacquering-room for years, and kept it in better order,

the clerk of works said, than it had ever been before."

"Quite possibly." And Mr. Ballinger stirred the fire. "There are diversities of gifts. Many women of weak intellect have a capacity for work of a manual description, but their testimony in a court of law would not be admitted. This woman was a foreigner, I believe, of peculiar manner and habits. She may have had some ulterior motive in the story which she fabricated, and into which she has brought my name. I should prefer at present not venturing an opinion upon the subject."

"I don't know about her motives," said Mr. Arncliffe; "but as the rest of the story tallies with what I heard before, I don't see why we shouldn't give her credit for honesty in this part of it. However, I will not trouble you further now, as your time is not always at your own disposal. I think my best plan will be to see Armstrong about it,

and then some evening when you are not very busy, we will perhaps talk it over again. I must say I should like to see to the end of it, now that we have begun."

Mr. Ballinger turned over the law papers which lay upon the desk before him. Whatever else Mr. Arncliffe was allowed to do, he certainly must not be allowed to trouble Mr. Armstrong upon this subject at present. Things were getting awkward. A gap in the hedge, just opposite a most unseemly rubbish heap, seemed unavoidable. He must have time to throw up a temporary screen before the mischief went any farther; and the only way of doing this was to keep Mr. Armstrong in ignorance for a few weeks. He meant himself to see him at once, find out how much he knew, also whether he had any written evidence to bring forward respecting his uncle's intentions. That being done, he would make his plans accordingly.

"Excuse me, my dear sir," he said, very

cautiously, "but I do not think it would be advisable for you at present to take such action as you indicate. I am exceedingly sorry not to be able to furnish you with the requisite information; and I perfectly sympathise with your desire for complete satisfaction; but if you will be good enough to place the matter in my hands, not, I beg to state, with the remotest view to professional interest on my part, but solely for the purpose of probing its merits to the uttermost, I will promise that it shall be treated with the attention it deserves."

"The money hasn't been paid, then, has it?" said Mr. Arncliffe, bluntly, as he rose to go.

"To my knowledge, certainly not, Mr. Arncliffe. I believe I am correct in assuring you that no provision of the nature you mention has ever been made for the Monke-stons; at least, not under my hand. Of course I am not able to state what arrange-

ments may have been entered into without my cognisance ; but I am exceedingly glad to dispel the erroneous impression which my respected friend Mr. Armstrong has made—unconsciously, of course, for I believe him to be a person of the strictest integrity—and it will give me great pleasure, at my earliest convenience, to inquire farther into the matter, and acquaint you with its bearings. I may consider, then, I presume, that it is in my hands for the present? You will take no farther action until you hear from me?”

And much relieved to have the interview at an end, Mr. Ballinger bowed his visitor out.

CHAPTER VI.

MR. ARNCLIFFE was satisfied now on the chief point of his anxiety. The Monkestones had never received any pecuniary help from old Hiram Armstrong, of Wastewood. Whether such help had ever been intended, whether it had been offered and declined, or whether, having been set apart to their use, it had been afterwards turned into another channel, were questions which might be settled by-and-by, but which need not interfere with present action.

He decided what he would do, and next afternoon sent for Roger to him in the inner-office. The young man came with that brave, free consciousness of well-doing, which is the best help to independence. No

need for him to turn aside from the shrewd yet kindly look of the keen grey eyes; no need to brush up excuses, or ask time for consideration, when summoned to private interviews with his employer. That queer affair of old Armstrong's was a matter of perfect indifference to him. If it had not been, though, Mr. Arncliffe's words would have set him at ease.

"It's all right, Roger," said the old man, shaking hands with him heartily. "I've seen Ballinger about it. There's a hitch somewhere, but it isn't on your side of the question, and so we can set to work at once. You've served me now for eleven years, and I've given you fair wages, and taught you as much as I could, eh?"

"That was more to me, though, than any wages," said Roger, thinking of those long mathematical and astronomical lessons in which his teacher's patience had never failed. "You have taken more trouble with me

than ever I can repay you for, if I worked here at mechanics' wages all my life."

Old Matthew dashed a tear off his eyelashes.

"All right, my boy, but we must start on a fresh track now. I don't despise gratitude, it's a very good thing in its way, but I should despise myself if I could make use of it to serve my own ends. You have a good head for this sort of thing, Roger, and you have a fair knowledge of what belongs to the different departments, and it would be a mean trick of me to keep you here at mechanics' wages, or even an upper clerk's salary, when you might be making your six or seven hundred a year at one of the great houses in London. Now I'll tell you what I'll do. I will either give you a recommendation to one of these London houses, a post at the Observatory, if you like, or abroad,—I have applications almost every month for suitable people,—or you can stop here

with a share in the concern, and a reasonable proportion of the profits. It's just in your own hands what you would like to do."

"I would rather stay with you, sir," said Roger, quietly.

"That's right. I'm glad you've taken it that way. I'm not quite what I used to be, for I've worked hard and lived sparsely, and it's beginning to tell upon me, and I should like to know there was someone ready for my place when I've done with it. Only it was fair I should give you the choice between here, and London, or the Continent. You might, perhaps, give yourself more there to the scientific part of it. Here there's a good deal of mere handwork, though that's a fine field enough for a young man with taste for it; and there's no knowing what you may come to by-and-by."

"No, no, now don't go into that sort of thing," he continued, as Roger was beginning to express his thanks. "That isn't what I

want at all. I can't bear to have people expressing their obligations to me when I'm only looking after my own profit. Here I am, and I want the work done ; there you are, and you can do it. It's a fair balance, and there's no need for anyone to go down on their knees about it. Only, Roger, there's one thing I want to say to you."

"I am ready to hear it, sir."

"Take care of your sister. She's a brave little woman, and she'll be a blessing to you all your life. I don't know that I've got anything more to say. If you'll reach me those papers out of the safe, I'll be going on a little with the lenses. I think now, if I'm spared to see them mounted, I shall be content. You can go back to your work, and we'll arrange about the rest when I come over to Bishop's Lane some of these evenings."

Roger went back to one of the higher finishing-rooms, where he had been em-

ployed for the last few weeks, in matters connected with the new telescope. But he could not settle down to work; he only wandered about amongst the instruments, re-adjusting a wheel or a screw here and there, or looking over the piece of clock-work which was to keep those great lenses slowly moving with the motion of the earth. This was Roger's own idea for the Paris telescope, so he took especial interest in the working out of it; and great had been his delight, a week or two before, when, on the first trial, it was found to move with almost perfect accuracy. He set it in motion now, watched it for a little while, then turned away, and sitting down by the fire with his hands in his pockets, began to think.

So what he had been longing after all his life, had come to him. These years of patient waiting and working had opened to him at last the gate of success. He was

to be a partner in the great Woolsthorpe works. What that meant he scarcely realised as yet, only that it gave him leave to spend his whole life in the work which he loved best—which it would be his pride to do faithfully and well, and which would be done now for its own sake alone.

Partner in the Woolsthorpe works ! How differently that would have sounded three months ago !—what a different future it would have opened before him ! How impatiently he would have waited then for the sound of the great bell and the tramp of the workmen's feet, that he might hurry away to the corridor and tell little blue-hooded Gretchen ! He would have bidden her home to him then, and she would have come,—he was sure she would,—before this other voice, which she was following now, had begun to call. And they would have been so happy. All that he could have won of fame and honour and world's wealth

would have been so much dearer to him for her sweet sake. He would have worked so hard for her; he would have made her home so fair and pleasant. Why did everything come too late? Why did the sun only break out when the mountain-top of hope had long been left behind, and there was no longer any fair, far-reaching prospect to look forth upon? Well, be it so. He had still Jean and his work to live for, and a place to make in the world, and much to find out there. A man must be content with that, the rest being gone.

Mr. Arncliffe came quietly in, and laid his hand on the young man's shoulder. Roger started as if he had been caught in some guilty act.

"Building castles in the air, eh? I haven't seen you start like that since you were a little lad, looking in through the gates yonder, and I asked you to make room for me to come in. Eleven years ago.

You seemed as if you were looking into Paradise then, your bit of a face was so bright and eager. You may be looking into it now again, though, for anything I know."

"No, sir. I was only thinking what might have been, not what may be. You have given me all the Paradise I care for now."

"For the present, Roger, boy—for the present. It won't last you all your life—pity if it could. When you come to be an old man, like me, it's time enough to think of what might have been. Think of the possible now, and make it the actual. Does the clock-work go right?"

"Quite. I believe you will find it as true as the sun. I have just been trying it."

"Bravo! That's better than 'might have been.' Stick to what lies before you, Roger, and you'll be the right sort of man some day."

“Thinking of his mother, poor lad !” said the old man, when Roger had gone away to tell Jean all about it. “I wish she could have lived to see what he will make out one of these days. Well, he may thank God if never a ‘might have been’ comes to him that’s harder to think about than that.”

CHAPTER VII.

SOON after that conversation at the Woolsthorpe works, a change began to manifest itself in the little house under the east front of the Minster. Instead of ready-made linen, strips of embroidery, and boxes of tapes and edgings, a Winter garden of ferns and creeping plants filled up the bow window; and behind them fell soft, heavy crimson curtains, past which could be caught occasionally glimpses of very pretty furniture, and the beautiful carved oak-work for which Jean was quite famous now. A second widow, in reduced circumstances—there were always plenty of them in Cruxborough—took the stock of goods, and

began business farther down the street. The house was "done up" afresh by the Dean and Chapter. The name over the door, "Mrs. Monkeston, Haberdasher, and dealer in fancy work," which for eleven long years had stood between that unfortunate woman and anything like a respectable position in Cruxborough, was painted out, a change at which even the winking little dormer windows in the roof rejoiced, for as soon as a slip of panelling replaced the obnoxious words, they began to perk themselves up on the strength of their new dignity, and nodded to each other complacently, as much as to say, "You see, we are out of business at last."

Young Monkeston, too, began to carry himself differently. It was quite astonishing, people said, what an improvement had taken place in him since the Festival. You never met him whistling in the streets now, or jaunting along in a careless, jovial way,

like an ordinary workman. Instead, he held up his head with what might almost be termed pride, if a man in his position could ever have anything to be proud about, and seemed to feel at last that something more was required of him than merely doing his work well, according to the injunctions of the Shorter Catechism. Quite a change for the better. There was really no telling now what he might be fit for some day, in a social point of view.

When Cruxborough had satisfied itself that the shop really was defunct, not relegated to a shuffling back-stairs existence, under the joint management of Gurtha and Mrs. Bratchet, it began to consider whether, after all, cards might not be left at the little bow-windowed house in Bishop's Lane. So far as Miss Monkeston, poor thing, was concerned, it thought the attention might be offered with perfect impunity, for her mourning was, on the whole, very handsome ; and

Canon Boniface's daughter had been known to call upon her several times since her mother's death. Besides, she never went into society—no one ever heard of her being seen in public, except at the Minster services, so that the usual invitations would not be expected to follow a call of ceremony. It would simply answer its purpose of an excuse for drawing young Monkeston a little more into society.

For if it was true that Mr. Arncliffe had taken him into partnership, something ought to be done. It was so very different from a shop. A share in the Woolsthorpe works was almost equal to a professional position, besides being such a splendidly-paying thing. If Mr. Arncliffe himself had not been such a peculiar old man, so shy and awkward, and so remiss in all the little social courtesies, he might have mixed in the very best circles of Cruxborough. And so might his young partner, too, now, if only he would

rub up and show himself equal to the situation. Cruxborough would give him the opportunity of doing so, at any rate. And as it knew he thought a great deal of his sister, and would not accept any courtesy which had not previously been at least offered to her, it put its pride in its pocket, its best bonnet on its head, and actually called upon "those Monkestones."

How Mrs. Balmain rejoiced now in that most wise kind-heartedness which had kept her husband from quite cutting Roger when he passed him in the street. How she praised herself for the admirable prevision which had, as it were, left the social door on the latch, in case the young mechanic should ever be qualified to give the proper regulation knock thereat, and avail himself of the privilege of access. She even walked over to the new house on the Portman Road, on purpose to consult Mrs. Ballinger as to the expediency of giving a select little

entertainment, to which Mr. Monkeston should be invited as the central guest.

“I thought I would ask you first, you know, my dear Mrs. Ballinger, for I was not quite sure whether you would like to meet him. I am always very particular about introducing people if I am not certain they will be agreeable. It struck me that perhaps a dinner would be most sociable, more marked, you know, than an indiscriminate evening party; only, poor fellow, I daresay he hasn’t the least idea what to do with his *serviette* or finger-glass. I believe that sort of people never have; but still, it could be quite a small affair—only yourself, and Mr. Ballinger, and Matilda, with Mr. Armstrong, of course; so it wouldn’t signify so much if he did happen to make a slip or two. You know, my husband has taken such a fancy to Mr. Armstrong. I think he begins to feel himself quite one of us. I really say sometimes I must tell him he ought not to

come quite so often, or someone that I could mention will begin to feel jealous. Don't you think so, my dear?"

And Mrs. Balmain glanced brightly towards Matilda, then downwards, to that young lady's engaged finger. No ring there yet, and the Festival, with its attendant opportunities, over three months ago. Matilda understood the glance, but she was not in the least disconcerted. She knew herself, and she knew Mr. Armstrong, and she was sure that nothing but his over-modesty, carried in this case perhaps a little too far, prevented him from appropriating so great a favour as her undivided heart.

"I really don't think anything about it," she replied, toying carelessly with a piece of wool-work; "but I am delighted if poor Mr. Armstrong has found another place where he can enjoy himself a little. You know one does not like to have every night filled up with friends dropping in in that

way, and it really is a relief to have an evening to ourselves occasionally. I wonder he did not begin to come to you long ago. He is a man that is fond of society, and he likes people who have seen the world. That is why I am so surprised at his coming here as he does, when pa and Reginald have never been abroad. What ever can he find in us? Did I not say so, ma, only last night?"

"My dear," said Mrs. Ballinger, with that maternal complacency which sits so well on a middle-aged woman with plenty of handsome lace, "Mr. Armstrong pleases himself. I always let people do as they like. Poor fellow! he knows there is a knife and fork ready for him whenever he comes."

Though really Mrs. Ballinger did begin to wish he would not be so slow in observing that something else was ready besides the knife and fork, or even the material upon which to exercise them. But she dis-

missed the subject. It was one which she did not prefer to discuss, especially with Mrs. Balmain."

"I do not think," she said, returning to the dinner, "that Mr. Ballinger would have any objection to meet young Monkeston. You know, Mrs. Monkeston behaved very rudely to him about the time of her husband's death, when he offered to take the management of her affairs, and put the lad into the office; but Nathan is a man who can afford to put such things on one side. His position is so thoroughly established now, that he does not need to stand upon trifles, like some people."

This was intended as a delicate little reflection upon Mr. Balmain, who had lately failed in obtaining a public office in the City, and between whom, therefore, and the gentleman who had obtained it, there was a difference so bitter that the two ob-

jected even to meet on the neutral ground of social intercourse.

“You see my husband,” continued Mrs. Ballinger, “knows where he is, and what he is, and that makes such a difference, and other people know it too. I have not the slightest doubt, if he thought it would help young Monkeston to a better position in the place, he would meet him in society with the greatest pleasure. He always likes to encourage anyone who is deserving.”

To a greater extent than this, the purest philanthropy—even the philanthropy of Mr. Ballinger himself—could not be expected to go. His wife, therefore, felt she had said all that could be said on the subject. Perhaps, also, she might have her own private views in the direction of Mr. Monkeston. If Mr. Armstrong really, after all, did not come to the point before long with Matilda, and if Mr. Arncliffe had behaved liberally in that affair of the partnership, which, judg-

ing from the abolition of the shop, he must have done, Roger might be cultivated to advantage. Everyone knew what was the next thing when a young man got taken into partnership; he wanted a wife, of course—the most proper thing, too; and with Mr. Arncliffe getting into years, and an old bachelor, and so peculiar as everyone said he was, there was really no telling what might happen when he once began to take such a violent fancy to anyone. Mrs. Ballinger said she should be quite ready to accept.

Accordingly, Mrs. Balmain, who had been pursuing exactly the same train of thought, except that one of her own daughters occupied the place assigned by the solicitor's wife to Matilda, issued invitations for a quiet little dinner early in January; the guests to number five—Mr. and Mrs. Ballinger, Matilda, Mr. Armstrong, and Roger Monkeston, who, with herself, Mr. Balmain, and Edie,

would form as snug a party as could be desired by even the most bashful young candidate for social honours.

To her great surprise Roger declined. Shyness, no doubt, poor young man ! and conscious inability to carry himself creditably through the ordeal. She would have him in quite alone some evening, and give him a hint or two which would be useful to him. But in the meantime she must ask a gentleman to fill his place ; and after reviewing the circle of her acquaintance, she fixed upon Mr. Arncliffe, who had met her husband at one or two scientific meetings in the city, and had invited him to go over the works. That was sufficient ground. Mr. Balmain had no objection to a further intimacy with the celebrated old astronomer, so he looked in one afternoon and gave the invitation.

Mr. Arncliffe accepted, a somewhat unusual thing for him to do in respect of such

invitations, his social festivities having, for the last few years, been confined to a cup of tea at the Monkestones, or a cigar with old Canon Boniface. But he told Mr. Balmain honestly enough that he should be glad of an opportunity of meeting Mr. Armstrong, and therefore he would put his other engagements aside for an evening, and come.

For the weeks were passing, and Mr. Ballinger made no further reference to that affair of the money, though he had promised to give it his immediate attention nearly two months ago. And if, during a chance encounter in the streets, it happened to be mentioned, he began to heave restlessly, like a steamer on the point of starting, churned up a commotion with those huge paddles of verbiage, which were always so ready for work, and then steered magnificently away, amidst a foam of excuses. Really he had been so pressed with engagements lately, such numbers of public meetings, committees,

vestries, and so forth ; but he had made a note of the matter, and Mr. Arncliffe might depend upon its having his earliest attention. Indeed, he had once or twice been on the point of going over to Wastewood, or asking Mr. Armstrong to drop in some evening to talk it over, but something or other had always interfered. However, in a few days, at the most——

And Mr. Ballinger, waving his hand politely, departed.

At last Mr. Arncliffe was tired of excuses, and meant to take the matter into his own hands. For this purpose he had set apart an evening to go over to Wastewood himself, and hear what Mr. Armstrong had to say on the subject, when Mr. Balmain's invitation placed the opportunity in his hands without the formality of a call.

Mr. Ballinger, entering the doctor's drawing-room in the solemn splendour of evening dress, was somewhat disconcerted to find at

the further end of it, apparently engaged in a very interesting conversation, the two men whom, of all others, he most wished to keep apart. He had come prepared to shed the light of his countenance on a modest young man whom fortune was beginning to favour; to pat on the back a successful mechanic, who, when a youth, had swept out his offices and lighted his fires; to whom, moreover, he intended to have been a benevolent patron, had not circumstances over which he had no control stepped in between him and that intention. Instead, he found Matthew Arncliffe and Stanley Armstrong elbow to elbow in confidential chat. Flint and steel striking each other were not more likely to kindle tinder than these two men were to drop a spark into that old dishonesty of his, and light up a fire with it which might one day drive him out of Cruxborough.

But a guest in his friend's drawing-room cannot at once walk to the further end of it,

and separate the flint and steel which have come into dangerous collision there. He must needs stop by the way to chat with his host and hostess, hear what they have to say concerning politics, the weather, state of public health, and many other interesting topics ; then, perhaps, undergo an introduction or two, with its attendant little puff of small talk, and pay a few compliments to the ladies, before taking steps for the rescue of his unfortunate little bit of tinder, if the spark has not meanwhile fallen into it.

As was the case now, the astronomer and the colonial merchant having had at least half an hour of conversation before poor Mr. Ballinger could extricate himself for the purpose of shaking hands with them.

“Excuse me, Mr. Arncliffe,” said the owner of Wastewood, when the two gentlemen had drifted into the desired subject, “but it strikes me I have seen you before. Where, I cannot for the life of me make

out, but I certainly do know your face."

"You were going to London, I believe, some three months back," answered Mr. Arncliffe, "by the evening mail, and I happened to be in the same carriage with you. I suppose that was it."

"Ah! so I was—going up to the Winter sales, of course. I recollect it as well as can be now; and you were the little gentleman in the plaid—well, no, not in it, exactly, for I believe you gave it to that wretched-looking woman that came in in such a scrimmage. And that other fellow and I were talking about you too. Really, one never knows what one's doing."

"All right," said Mr. Arncliffe. "I heard nothing worse of myself than I knew already; but I did hear something that interested me very much, about a matter that has been puzzling me ever since. Maybe you can set me right about it now."

And then Mr. Arncliffe recalled the con-

versation, together with the story relating to it, which Mrs. Bratchet had told. Mr. Armstrong could say little more about it than his companion had already heard.

“I remember my poor old uncle’s letter as well as can be,” he said; “and I wish I had kept it, if it would have been any satisfaction to you; but of course I took no particular interest in it at the time. It never occurred to me then that I should come in for the property, and so it was no consequence how my uncle chose to dispose of it. I know he said he had appropriated a certain number of shares,—I can’t tell now how many,—to the use of this family, the interest to be paid quarterly, or as it was needed; and he seemed to think he’d done the right thing at last. Poor fellow! it must have been very near the time of his death, now I come to think about it—not more, I should say, than a week or two before; for I was up country looking after some property for

a friend who was just dead, and I remember the date of that very well."

"Yes," - said Mr. Arncliffe, more than ever convinced now of the truth of Patch's story, "that was the time. And that woman whom you have mentioned,—who came into the carriage, you know, after we had started,—was servant to old Mr. Armstrong when he died, and it was about a week before his death that he told her about the money, and only a few months ago she told it to this Mrs. Bratchet, who is now living in Cruxborough; but she has this addition to what you have said, that the money was given in trust to Mr. Ballinger. That is what I should like to have cleared up."

"I don't remember Mr. Ballinger's name being mentioned. It may have been, and I have forgotten it. Could we get hold of the woman, and have her story from beginning to end? That would be the most straightforward way."

“So it would; but, unfortunately, we can’t get hold of her. She was going to London that night, and no one has heard anything of her since. Whether she is dead or alive we don’t know, and she has no friends about here, either; so you were the only person to come to. The reason I stir in the matter is this: the gentleman who was talking to you in the carriage had the impression that a heavy premium had been paid to me with Roger Monkeston, and you told him that a provision had been made for that purpose, which seemed to satisfy him. Now, no premium ever was paid to me, and Roger Monkeston tells me that no money was ever received by the family from Mr. Armstrong. Where is it, then, and who *did* get it? That’s what puzzles me. You know, when I find a knot I like to untie it; that’s been my way all along, or I shouldn’t be where I am now. Knots of art or knots of science, it doesn’t matter which; and this

is a knot, I must say, which I should very much like to see my way into."

"You shall, too, Mr. Arncliffe, if I can give you any help."

That was the point which the two gentlemen had reached when Mr. Ballinger, with the blandest of smiles, came in between them.

CHAPTER VIII.

A FEW days later, Mr. Ballinger was surprised by a visit from his friend, Mr. Armstrong. Well, perhaps not exactly surprised, since he had been expecting for some weeks past that the owner of Wastewood would request the favour of a little private conversation with him, for the purpose of obtaining his sanction to an affection which had now become the closest interest of his life. Mr. Ballinger had even jotted down a few heads of remarks which he intended to make on the occasion; and had composed a most touching speech, expressive of the pleasure he felt in welcoming Mr. Armstrong into his family as a son-in-

law; and he had several times rehearsed it privately, with the long fatherly shake of the hand which was to accompany its closing sentences.

But Mr. Armstrong had not come to ask to be admitted into the family. Rather he had come to ask to be allowed to look through that splendid evergreen hedge, which for ten years had been broadening and thickening round Mr. Ballinger's private affairs; to look through it, moreover, at a point which commanded a most undesirable prospect—the prospect of a rubbish-heap, for which its owner might be indicted as a public nuisance. The proprietor must look about him, put up his screens, protest as politely as he could against any infringement upon his rights, and, if needful, warn off trespassers who did not come there by due authority of the higher powers.

Mr. Armstrong's errand was soon told.

Did Mr. Ballinger recollect having an interview with Mr. Hiram Armstrong, of Wastewood, about ten years ago—in fact, just before that gentleman's death?

Mr. Ballinger looked up to the roof of his office, down to the floor of it, out to the windows of it, buried his hands in his pockets, assumed an air of profound abstraction, as if the turning up of that particular bit of wreck amongst the accumulated driftwood of memory was, for the present, all-important; then beamed benevolently down upon his visitor. He was exceedingly sorry; he really could not charge himself with any such interview—in fact, so many absorbing interests had arisen in the meantime, and so many affairs of public life had crowded upon him, that his recollections of a time so far back were in the highest degree apocryphal. Mr. Ballinger got hold of the right word this time. He was exceedingly sorry to disappoint his friend, but he

must decline to commit himself to anything which might be considered as evidence upon the subject.

“Admirable,” thought Mr. Ballinger, when the sentence was concluded. “Screen thick enough to baffle the most vigilant inspector of nuisances; and that old witch of a woman, Patch, safely out of the way, too—dead, most likely, or swallowed up in the smoke and scum of London; or, with Mrs. Bratchet’s fifteen and sixpence in her pocket, hiding out of sight of the police, who, he hoped and trusted, would search long enough before they lighted upon her. Nothing could have been better.”

Mr. Armstrong looked puzzled, but returned to the charge. Did Mr. Ballinger’s memory serve him, then, as to a transaction relative to some bank shares which had been transferred about that time?

Mr. Ballinger thought awhile. He must begin to tread softly now. It would not do

to make any statement which the Martinet ledgers, unbribable and unalterable, might falsify. And yet he must say something, if he could, which would prevent Mr. Armstrong from having recourse to them.

“Yes, he did remember purchasing some shares which Mr. Armstrong wished to get rid of. In fact, he might say it was a little private arrangement between them, and he took them entirely as a matter of accommodation, knowing that the owner of them was anxious to realize some of his capital just then. But as to the amount paid, or the circumstances of the transfer, he really could not take upon himself to give any information, so many other more important events having taken place in the interval.

“Of course the bank books would settle that,” Mr. Armstrong suggested.

Mr. Ballinger preferred that the bank books should *not* settle it, because they might settle other things at the same time,

which would be much better unsettled. And so he promised that if Mr. Armstrong left the matter in his hands, he would refer to his accounts of that date, and give him a satisfactory statement. It would simply be a question of trouble. Mr. Armstrong need not apologise in the least, he should only be too delighted to take it.

And could Mr. Ballinger remember, then, persisted this indefatigable inquirer into nuisances, if, in connection with that transaction, any money had been set apart for the use of the Monkestones, any sum of interest appointed to be paid to them, any indemnification, if it might be so called, for injury supposed to have been inflicted on the elder Monkeston.

“Well, really, my dear sir,”—and Mr. Ballinger made a desperate attack with his sharp grey-green eyes upon a particular spot in the oilcloth, as if determined to discover all about everything there,—“I am uncom-

monly sorry, but I am really quite unable to give you any information which I could honestly consider reliable on the subject. If you could favour me now with the letter which your late respected uncle wrote, and in which he mentioned this matter to you, it might possibly recall to my mind the facts of the case."

"Unfortunately I cannot do that," said Mr. Armstrong. "I destroyed it, along with a heap of other correspondence, some years ago, before I thought it would ever become of any value. My only dependence is upon my memory and your own."

Mr. Ballinger bowed. That was just as it ought to be.

"Dear me! a great pity! You see, a written document would have made all the difference in a matter like this. If I could have seen the late Mr. Armstrong's own expressions, I could possibly, by a strong effort of retrospection, have produced something like

a remembrance of the circumstances ; but at present I must confess my utter inability to do anything of the sort. If I might trouble you to step in again, in the course of a few days ; or, stay, if you would do us the favour to dine with us at the beginning of the week, we will thoroughly ventilate the subject, and I will endeavour to satisfy the anxiety which you very properly feel to acquaint yourself with the intentions of your lamented uncle. Be assured, my dear sir, that I fully sympathise with your desire to do justice to his memory, and to carry out any plans which he might have conceived ; and it would be a great gratification to myself, indeed, I think I may be allowed to say it would afford me the most supreme pleasure to know that I had been of the least benefit to you in the prosecution of an undertaking which reflects equal credit upon your honour and affection."

And having thus got the paddles in mo-

tion, Mr. Ballinger loosed his moorings, and steamed away to a more convenient topic.

After a little more chat, Mr. Armstrong took his leave ; but he did not let the matter drop. Next day he went to the bank. There he had less difficulty in getting to the root of the matter. He found that on a given date a certain number of shares, duly numbered and registered, had been transferred from his uncle to Mr. Ballinger. The time was exactly one week before Mr. Armstrong's death. That coincided with the evidence he had in his uncle's letter. The testimony of Patch, also—at least, so much of it as could be brought forward—was to the same effect. The bank books proved that the shares had been transferred to Mr. Ballinger ; his own letter proved that Mr. Armstrong had intended to make this transfer in the interest of the Monkestones, and Patch's assertion supplied the missing link, that Mr. Ballinger had been the party to

whom the carrying out of this transaction was committed ; though, of course, without the woman's direct testimony, it was impossible to draw out such a case as would justify legal proceedings.

Things were beginning to look rather black against Mr. Ballinger now. That worthy gentleman, in such intervals as could be spared from professional engagements, and taking of chairs at charitable meetings, was considering how best to slip through the net in which unfortunate circumstances had entangled him. Mr. Armstrong had spoken of going to the bank. Of course, if he did that—and he had given no promise not to do it—there was an end of everything ; for the books bore witness to the transfer of the shares, and he must give an account of them.

But there was still a loophole of escape. The books did not bear witness to the purpose for which the shares were transferred.

The letter in which old Hiram had mentioned that purpose to his nephew was destroyed; and Patch, the only person whose testimony could now directly criminate himself, had, by a most merciful interposition of Providence, left the place. Where she was, no one knew; and more time and money than the search was worth might be spent in finding her out. It would be perfectly safe for him, then, to take his stand on the only firm piece of ground left to him now—namely, to declare that the shares were given to him by Mr. Armstrong as an equivalent for his professional services, and as a slight mark of respect for the friendship which had for many years subsisted between them. He could also say to the nephew, if further pressed upon the subject, that he believed, upon second consideration, there had been a hint dropped as to some pecuniary help which might be advantageous to the Monkestones, and that he had

offered to give that help by settling the affairs of the widow, and taking the boy into his office. But as both proposals had been at once declined, he considered that his responsibility was at an end.

There was one way left yet for Mr. Ballinger to save his dignity. He might have given up the shares, said that he had been acting under a wrong impression, and offered to restore the accumulated interest of the past ten years. That would have given him a right to face Mr. Armstrong with perfect confidence, but it would have deprived him also of a dividend, amounting now to almost a snug little fortune; and Mr. Ballinger would rather look slightly to one side, when he met his expected son-in-law, than give up an income like that. So many pounds a year was a heavy price to pay for the privilege of looking a man in the face. That admission about the possible claims of the Monkes-

tons was humiliating—admissions always were so ; but still they involved nothing but loss of dignity, and a man might sustain worse losses than that. By taking advantage of this side-wind, and tacking judiciously round, Mr. Ballinger could keep the whole of the money in his possession ; and if there did happen to be a little awkwardness at first, it would soon tide over. At any rate, it need not interfere with the amicable relations between himself and Mr. Armstrong, nor the matrimonial connection which he hoped might before long be established as the result of six months' unlimited hospitality towards that gentleman.

So when old Hiram's nephew came again, Mr. Ballinger received him with the utmost cordiality. He had given the subject a very careful consideration, and he was now prepared to give his friend such an explanation of the facts as would at once and for ever set his mind at rest thereupon. Then fol-

lowed the explanation as aforesaid, given in Mr. Ballinger's most eloquent and impressive platform style, with suitable pauses for sips of cold water and rounds of applause.

The applause did not come, for Mr. Armstrong listened with somewhat incredulous politeness ; but if it failed, there was no outward manifestation, either, of discontent. A gentleman's word was not to be questioned, especially the word of a gentleman who had so courteously entertained him, and whose position in the town was so abundantly fortified by public esteem.

But Stanley Armstrong did not accept Mr. Ballinger's next invitation to dinner.

CHAPTER IX.

INSTEAD of accepting it, he went to have a cigar with Mr. Arncliffe and Roger Monkeston at the Woolsthorpe works. He there explained the state of affairs, which, in default of further proof, he left where they were. There had been wrong dealing somewhere, though it was impossible now to bring it home to the culprit. Without a doubt, Mr. Ballinger had appropriated to his own use money intended for the benefit of Ralph Monkeston's son. That was clear enough, so far as circumstantial evidence could make it clear, and, for the rest, they must be content to wait.

As for Roger, he did not care to go further into the case. He had made his own

way without help from Mr. Ballinger ; he knew his mother's proud independence ; and he also scorned to pay himself out of an injury that had been done to another. He and his sister preferred having no further inquiry made. They had enough ; they were content.

So was Mr. Arncliffe, now that justice had been done to his friends ; and there the matter might have ended, if Mr. Armstrong had not talked it upon with Mr. Balmain at the next committee over which the two gentlemen met. Mr. Balmain talked it over with his wife, and his wife talked it over with Edie and Gracie ; and the end of it all was, that Mr. Armstrong came much more frequently than heretofore to have a game at chess or a rubber of whist with the doctor and his family. And if sometimes during these pleasant little evenings, that very curious affair of Mr. Ballinger's came under consideration, and if Mrs. Balmain gave it

as her opinion that extravagance might be carried a little too far, and if the doctor intimated that, for his part, he thought five-and-twenty per cent. rather a risky rate of interest to build so much display upon, and if now and then a remark was dropped about the excellent matchmaking capabilities of Mrs. Ballinger, or Miss Matilda's over-evident anxiety about a suitable settlement, such little drifts in the current of conversation were abundantly natural, and quite what might have been expected under the circumstances.

And then, although Mrs. Balmain very much respected her dear friend Mrs. Ballinger, never omitted calling upon her at proper times, asked her to dinner four times a year, would not on any account have wounded her feelings by copying the cut of her dress or the trimming of her bonnet, or ordering a mantle from Madame Parasuti after the pattern of one that had been sent

to the Portman Road, still, it was not likely that she could rest long in the possession of facts involving the character of a man of so much importance in Cruxborough as Mr. Ballinger, without mentioning the matter to one or two of her most intimate acquaintances, in the strictest confidence; not with the least intention of malice—Mrs. Balmain was thankful to say she had never, in the whole course of her life, been pointed at as a malicious woman—but merely for the sake of trying how the thing would look when placed under the microscope of friendly criticism. And so it came to pass that, in less than a month after that unfortunate little dinner at the doctor's house, all Cruxborough knew as much as could be known, and probably a great deal more than was really true, of Mr. Ballinger's delinquencies.

Discreditable, very discreditable, for a man in his position. He ought to have known better. But they were not surprised.

It was a singular fact, that the people in Cruxborough never were surprised when their neighbours did wrong. They were not at all surprised. When a family all at once made such a wonderful spring, indulged in such display, and launched out to such an extent, it was quite natural that the head of it should be led into underhand ways of keeping up appearances. Ugly reports had been flying about for some time, and no wonder, either. Poor Mrs. Ballinger!—they should think she would not hold up her head quite so high now, would not sail quite so majestically into church with her silks and her satins and her flounces. Pride must have a fall, and hers was a fall that would bring a good many bruises with it, no doubt. For, that her husband had been clever enough to manage matters so that nothing could really be proved against him in a court of law, only made his conduct more disgraceful. And to have done

it to the widow and fatherless, too!—those who were in a special manner committed to his sympathies!

And Cruxborough held up its hands in pious horror! It was always so ready to espouse the cause of the widow and fatherless, when indignation was the only betrothal ring needed for that purpose.

By-and-by Mrs. Balmain found that if she wished to keep up her position in the place, she must really drop the Ballingers. People were talking so very freely. Her friends positively objected to meet them in society. Before Mrs. Daylish, the Rector's wife, accepted for an evening party at the doctor's house, she called and asked point-blank if the Ballingers were to be there; because, if they were—Mrs. Daylish looked, and said no more.

And Mrs. Benfield, who happened to be calling one morning, when Matilda dropped in as usual, gracious and patronizing, took

her leave shortly after, in a very marked manner. Something must be done, and done at once, too, for Mrs. Balmain could not afford to lose her friends in that way. Her husband's position, also, required consideration. It was her duty to consult his interests as well as her own. A medical man was obliged to be so very careful as to the society he cultivated. And then the Ballingers seemed so perfectly unconscious of their altered circumstances. Mrs. Ballinger made as great a display as ever with her satins and feathers ; and Matilda put on as many airs and graces as if she were actually engaged to marry one of the wealthiest men in Cruxborough. Which Mrs. Balmain scarcely thought would ever be the case now, for, to her own certain knowledge, Mr. Armstrong had declined his last invitation to Portman Road, and that did not look very much like an engagement.

Did Mrs. Ballinger know, she wondered,

what everyone was saying about her? If not, perhaps it would only be kind to tell her. The poor woman would consult her own interests more, and those of her daughter, by retiring a little from public view. Not, of course, that she was to blame for her husband's short-comings—Mrs. Balmain would not say that; still, perhaps if she had not been so ostentatious in her manners, so determined to make a position in the place before Matilda was introduced, Mr. Ballinger might not have been so strongly tempted to meddle with what belonged to other people.

And then that young ape of a son, too, who they said was engaged to Captain Deveron's daughter. But most likely that would blow over now. Mrs. Ballinger need not have looked so jealously upon his frequent visits to the doctor's house, after dear Edie came home from that finishing-school in London. Indeed, Mrs. Balmain thought

Reginald's mother would be very thankful now to see him married into a respectable family at all. And, for her own part, she was glad that attachment, if it ever was an attachment, had come to nothing, for Mr. Armstrong had been so very marked in his attentions lately, that there was no longer any mistaking what he meant; and for her own part she really must say she should enjoy being able to tell Mrs. Ballinger of an engagement in that quarter. Perhaps it would do as much as anything towards taking down the good lady's pride.

Mrs. Balmain was graciously permitted to do so. About a couple of months after the first mention of that bank affair, she dressed herself in a suitable manner, and went out for a round of morning calls. Of course the chief subject of conversation during most of them was this rumoured dishonesty on the part of one of Cruxborough's most respected citizens. Various little cloudy hints

and suggestions were put together, until poor Mr. Ballinger's conduct showed very black indeed, worthy almost of legal punishment, if only suitable proceedings could have been taken against him ; and by the time Mrs. Balmain arrived at the house in Portman Road, she felt that she was doing an act of charity by at all allowing the light of her presence to fall upon a family whose respectability was now, to say the least of it, so very dubious.

This consciousness gave a slight air of dignity to her manner, which was not agreeable to Mrs. Ballinger. That lady had heard nothing of the unpleasant reports which were floating about from friend to friend, under cover of the strictest confidence. As yet she had only noticed the somewhat poverty-stricken appearance of the card-basket on her hall table, and the lengthening intervals which elapsed between Matilda's evening engagements. Also, they

had both of them remarked the rarity of Mr. Armstrong's visits; but that was business—nothing but business. He had been attending the London markets, and that had taken up a great deal of his time.

“I know I ought to apologise,” said Mrs. Balmain, coming in with a pleasant air of patronage. “It is really shameful of me not to have called ever so long ago; but, you know, I have such quantities of engagements now, they become quite oppressive. I tell my little Edie I will not have her make herself so attractive, and involve me in such shoals of company. But it is her first season, you know, and girls will be girls. Are you very much crushed with parties this Winter, my dear?”

And Mrs. Balmain smiled sweetly upon Matilda, who, she knew well enough, had not been asked anywhere for a month—at least, not into any good society. But then Matilda was a girl who wanted putting

down. Mrs. Balmain would not have done it to anyone else.

“Not so very much,” said Matilda, graciously. “You know, we see so much company at our own house. Reginald brings all his set here, and now that the regiment is likely to be removed soon, we are constantly having them. I tell him sometimes the place is just like a mess-room. But, you know, the officers are all so fond of him, it is really very flattering.”

“Exactly so, my dear. I believe military men are always very open-hearted. They do not stand upon ceremony with each other. Has Mrs. Benfield called lately? I do think officers’ wives are so charming—they are always such perfect gentlewomen.”

“I fancy not,” said Matilda, arranging some shaded wools for a roseleaf. “Ma, dear, did we ever return Mrs. Benfield’s last call? Do you know, I am afraid we have been frightfully rude to her. But

then, when one has such a circle of acquaintance, what can one do? I am sure I try not to overlook anyone, but it is really almost more than I can manage sometimes."

"I would lessen the circle, then, dear, if I were you," said Mrs. Balmain. "I do a little weeding of that sort myself every few years, or I should soon be overrun with people. I rather fancied, though, I had not seen you quite so often this Winter. That was a perfectly charming dinner at Mrs. Dewar's last week. Why in the world, dear Mrs. Ballinger, did you not accept? I quite expected to meet you there, because I know Mrs. Dewar always makes a point of asking us together. And she is getting into such exceedingly good society now. You meet the best people in Cruxborough there sometimes."

Cruel Mrs. Balmain! for she had it upon the best authority that the Ballingers were never invited at all, Captain Dewar having

heard of that disagreeable affair at the bank. But then Mrs. Ballinger had so often done just the same thing to herself, before her husband's practice was fully established; and it was so pleasant to be able now to give a little bit of a thrust in return.

“I think Cruxborough has been unusually gay this winter,” she continued, in the pleasantest manner possible. “Augustus says it is because the people have their Festival dresses to wear out. He is always so comical, you know. Matilda, dear, you must have that quilted satin petticoat made up at once, that blue satin one, you know, that you spoke of ordering from Madame Parasuti. The Dewars are having a party on the twelfth. Our notes came the day before yesterday. Of course you are going. It will be the event of the season, they say. If I knew what you were going to wear, I would arrange Edie's dress accordingly. I always think it is such a pity for girls to

spoil each other, when a little consultation beforehand would make everything right; and you know Edie always gets close up to you everywhere."

"Yes," said Matilda, with dignity. She was beginning to feel Mrs. Balmain's call rather a nuisance, especially as they had heard nothing yet of the Dewars' party.

"Poor Edie never shows to advantage alone. I sometimes think what a pity it is she has not a little more presence and self-possession, though her complexion is certainly very pretty. But she may dress as she likes for the twelfth, so far as I am concerned, for I intend to remain at home. So much going out does not suit me. I was saying so to you only the other day, was I not, ma dear?"

"You were, darling," said Mrs. Ballinger, complacently, but with just a little reserve of bitterness about the non-arrival of notes from Mrs. Dewar. "You really must begin

to take care of yourself. And you know, Mrs. Balmain, I have such an objection to girls being hawked about so much. It makes people talk."

"Oh! there are other things than *that* for people to talk about," said Mrs. Balmain, pluming up a little—as if she did not know what was proper for her daughters, as well as anybody else, and the whole city whispering of Mr. Ballinger's disgrace! "If people *will* talk, I say, let them do it; but my girls shall enjoy themselves all the same."

"Of course. And where an early settlement is desirable, it makes a difference. But when a girl's advantages are such that she can afford to choose for herself, I always disapprove of indiscriminate visiting. I wish Matilda to be very careful."

"Well, perhaps you are right; only we used to meet you so constantly at the Dewars during Matilda's first season—let

me see, how many years ago?—but, as you say, some girls can afford to wait. The Benfields are going a great deal into society too just now. She enjoys it so, you know. But I must say I was surprised when she told me she had declined your last invitation. I thought Mrs. Benfield would go anywhere for the sake of a little amusement, and I know she dotes upon Mr. Armstrong—she says he is so funny. But perhaps she is beginning to find she must be careful too. Augustus says, if he were Mr. Benfield, he should be quite jealous. All nonsense, of course, you know; we understand Mr. Armstrong a great deal too well for that. Indeed, if Augustus had not had the fullest confidence in him, he would never have thought of giving his consent.”

“Of course not,” said Mrs. Ballinger, vaguely, not catching the other lady’s meaning. “A medical man ought to be so very careful; and when a practice has only lately

been got together. You see, it is so different with my husband ; he stepped into a concern ready-made for him, as you may say,—for the Spragues were the first solicitors in the place, more than thirty years ago,—and there was his position at once. Although, you know, when Mr. Balmain *has* established himself, he can do what he likes.”

“Well, not *quite*, I hope,” said Mrs. Balmain. “I hope Augustus will always remember that character requires keeping as well as making. It would perhaps be well,” she added, with a sigh, “if we could all bear that in mind. It is not well to trust too much to the past.”

Here Mrs. Balmain paused for her pretty little bit of moralising to take effect. If a whisper of any sort *had* reached the poor things, now was the time to avail themselves of her kindly sympathy. But Mrs. Ballinger looked as complacent as ever, and Matilda, carelessly toying over that shaded rose-

leaf, manifested not the smallest consciousness of anything disgraceful. Curious! But some people never would own to their misdeeds. However, it was no concern of hers; she would say what she had to say, and then wish her friends good morning.

“But it is all settled now,” she continued, briskly; “and I hope and trust, for dear Edie’s sake, it is for the best. He is really a very kind-hearted man, though not, perhaps, quite so polished as one might wish. You know, we have had every opportunity of becoming acquainted with him, for he has been, as I may say, almost at home in the house for the last three months; and of course it was easy to see how it would end, though still such things always do come upon one rather suddenly at the last. But, Matilda, my dear, I don’t believe you have the least notion of what I am talking about, and I came on purpose to tell you myself, for I said you should not hear it from anyone

else. And so intimate as you and dear Edie have been ever since you left school, I was so sure that you would be delighted to hear that the dear child has the prospect of being settled so very comfortably ; and knowing Mr. Armstrong so well, too."

Matilda began to divine now the object of Mrs. Balmain's visit, and she felt as people of even the commonest sensibilities must be supposed to feel when an over-officious neighbour draws up her blinds and calls upon them to admire, from her windows, a prospect which they thought was commanded exclusively by their own. But the self-possession which had been instilled into her by a French governess at eighty pounds a year, served her well upon the present trying occasion. With a gracious calmness, which could not have been surpassed had her own engagement been the subject of conversation, she presented her congratulations to Mrs. Balmain.

“Dear Edie! I am sure she will be so glad. Indeed, you know, it is what I have been expecting for the last few weeks—indeed, ever since we gave Mr. Armstrong to understand that we did not care for such very frequent visits from him. You know, though he is very wealthy, and all that sort of thing, still he is not quite equal to the set that Reginald is gathering round him now; and so we thought we had better let him understand in time. But for Edie it is everything that one could wish.”

Matilda knew well enough that the best way to cheapen a neighbour's prospect is to say that you had it yourself, but preferred throwing out a window in another direction; especially when your neighbour's window has no frontage towards that quarter.

“And I hope,” continued Matilda, “she will be very happy; although, you know, I am just a little bit surprised at her caring to be mixed up with trade in that way. But

did I not say, ma, when we hinted to Mr. Armstrong to discontinue his visits a little, that I should not be a bit surprised if he transferred his attentions to Edie?"

"You did, my dear; and I am sure Miss Balmain has our very best wishes. Pray tell her so, Mrs. Balmain, from me, and say we are delighted to hear of it; though I daresay she is happy enough now to do without the congratulations of her friends. Young ladies are so sometimes, in such circumstances."

"And say, too," added Matilda, "that I think she ought to have come and told me about it herself. So intimate as we have been, you know."

"Well, my dear, to tell you the truth, I believe she was rather afraid of you—indeed, I told her myself I did not know what you would say to her when you heard it, because we always used to think Mr. Armstrong had attractions in this direction;

and sometimes there is just a little bit of feeling between girls—especially as we have heard you set down more than once as the probable mistress of Wastewood. Such a pretty place, dear Mrs. Ballinger,” and Mrs. Balmain turned to that lady—“an entirely new suite of drawing-room furniture, ordered in only last week, amber satin; and a hundred guinea piano from Broadwood. Mr. Armstrong is passionately fond of music, you know. I declare he will wear poor Edie out with making her sing to him. I am obliged to take him in hand sometimes, and make him do a little gossip with me instead. Oh! and that reminds me,” continued the voluble lady, who had the conversation chiefly in her own hands now—“that reminds me of such a curious story I heard the other day, about old Mr. Armstrong—Stanley’s uncle, you know.”

Matilda rather winced at that “Stanley.”

Mrs. Balmain meant she should. What had she come to the house for, but to take down that young lady's pride a little? "They say he put aside a lot of money for the use of the Monkestones, which they have never had. Mr. Ballinger was somehow mixed up with it, but I can't exactly say how. It is rather strange you should never have heard anything about it; but there may be nothing in it, after all. People will talk, you know. I will ask Stanley to come in some evening, and tell you what he knows, if you like."

"Oh! thank you; pray don't take the trouble," said Mrs. Ballinger, loftily. If Mrs. Balmain meant to be patronizing, the sooner she discovered her mistake the better. "Mr. Armstrong knows that he can come in whenever he likes, without the formality of an invitation. We left him that privilege when the incessant visiting was dropped. Perhaps, though, Edie would

feel more comfortable if the intercourse ceased entirely. Young ladies are a little jealous sometimes."

"Oh! dear, no, nothing of the sort. I fancy if there is any jealousy at all, it will be on the other side. It is not the first offer Edie has had, you know; and if she had declined it, it would not have been her first refusal, either. And, by-the-by, that reminds me again, I suppose we shall be hearing of Mr. Reginald's engagement before long. They say he is still very attentive to Captain Deveron's daughter. Rather high people, are they not? Tremendously exclusive, and all that sort of thing."

"I believe so," said Mrs. Ballinger, appropriating what she considered a compliment to her son's choice. "I hoped Reginald would never look beneath his own station for a wife, and he has not disappointed me. There is nothing like

young people considering their position."

"Nothing at all, Mrs. Ballinger, whilst it lasts. I think myself that there is nothing so important as character and position, and to behave so that people have no right to talk about you. But I think I ought to be going now."

And Mrs. Balmain took her leave, feeling that she had made a very successful visit. Because really it was no use unless sometimes you did put people in their places a little.

CHAPTER X.

THE weeks went on. Nothing more was said about those bank-shares, but it soon became generally known all over Cruxborough that Mr. Ballinger had acted very dishonourably about them—so dishonourably, indeed, as to make it unpleasant for other gentlemen to hold much intercourse with him. The consequence was that very few platform tickets were sent now to the office in the High Street, and Mr. Ballinger scarcely ever received obsequious notes, requesting him to take the chair at public meetings, or asking, as a great favour, that he would speak to sundry resolutions for advancing charitable interests in the City.

In one word, the solicitor found himself nowhere.

But the shares were in a much better position than that. No direct evidence could be brought forward to invalidate his claim to them ; no witness remained to testify to old Hiram's intentions respecting them. Patch's disappearance, and Mr. Armstrong's happy plan of destroying family correspondence, had made everything safe. True, Mr. Ballinger felt he was a marked man ; but then riches are a defence, for some people, even against the poisoned shafts of suspicion ; and neither averted looks, nor studiously cold recognitions in the public streets, could touch that splendid dividend which a long course of successful speculation, first started by the possession of old Hiram's bank-shares, yielded now. Let his old friends pass him if they chose—let Cruxborough charities find a new chairman, and its benevolent societies a more unexcep-

tionable president—a man with two hundred shares in Martinet's bank could manage to live still, and rather comfortably, too.

Fortunately for Reginald, soon after the affair became public talk, he was ordered to India with his regiment, and so avoided sharing his father's disgrace. At home it produced the result which disgrace generally does produce in families knit together by no common bond of respect or sympathy. Mrs. Ballinger, finding she could no longer hold up her head in society on the strength of her husband's position, made the more vigorous effort to sustain herself by sumptuous entertainments and general extravagance of living, for which extravagance Mr. Ballinger, as the best atonement which could be offered for the discredit he had brought upon his wife, was expected to find the means. Mrs. Ballinger did not care to remind her husband of his dishonesty so long

as he kept her purse well filled ; and Mr. Ballinger, on his part, found it advisable to purchase, with a liberal supply of house-keeping money, silence regarding the past. And so a sort of hollow peace was maintained between them, and things were carried on as usual at the grand mansion on the Portman Road.

Mr. Armstrong and dear Edie were married the following April. No need for a long engagement, as Mrs. Balmain said to Captain Benfield's wife, the families having been intimate so long, and Mr. Armstrong's position being so well established. Edie, in white silk and orange blossom, made the prettiest little bride imaginable. Everything went off charmingly. The Minster bells rang, flowers were scattered, presents poured in from all quarters, the Portman mansion excepted ; and after a tour on the Continent, the young people took possession of their home, with as fair a prospect of hap-

piness as the most loving circle of friends could have desired for them.

Mrs. Balmain was a triumphant mother-in-law. Now if Roger Monkeston, with his newly-achieved success and brilliant prospects, could only be drawn into the social vortex, and so initiated into the manners and customs of polite life as to become a suitable partner for golden-haired Gracie, she should feel her success complete.

But unfortunately Roger could not be made to see the desirability of this new opening. He and Jean lived on quietly enough in that little house at the end of Bishop's Lane, quite apart from dinners, dances, suppers, and all the other small-ware of social life. Not quite apart, though, from its decencies and civilities. Roger had been up to London with Mr. Arncliffe, had been introduced into the society of a few literary and scientific men, who never stopped to ask whether he could enter and

leave a room correctly ; had even attended one or two public dinners, and, stranger still, passed with perfect propriety through every stage of the proceedings. Cruxborough heard, too, that he had been courteously entreated by a few leading members of the aristocracy who had a fancy for telescopes, and that sort of thing ; and report did say that when the Duke of —, who was well known to have considerable scientific predilections, came through the city on his way to some great meeting in the west, young Monkeston took him over the Woolsthorpe works, explained everything to him in Mr. Arncliffe's absence, and afterwards had the honour of lunching with his Grace at the " Cruxborough Arms."

If that was true, there was no telling what might be the next move upward. Evidently the Monkestons had taken their places in the reserved seats, and must be dealt with accordingly.

It was astonishing how quickly that ducal luncheon obliterated the last lingering recollections of the ready-made linen shop, and how the reported touch of aristocratic hands washed out any suspicion of grease which might remain on those of Roger Monkeston. If Cruxborough could not be great itself, it could at least pay attention to those who had been in the presence of greatness. Roger, after that first visit to London with Mr. Arncliffe, and its pendant—the interview with the Duke—might, if he had been so minded, have found himself at home in half the drawing-rooms of his native city.

If he had been so minded. That was the difficulty again. For Roger's life was his work now, not any fame or position it might bring him ; and all interest save that work and his sister Jean, lay folded away in those three little months when the finishing-room had been to him as an earthly

Paradise, and Gretchen the tree of life therein.

That is not all a fable of the Red Cross Knight fighting with the huge dragon, and, sore wounded almost to death, falling close by

“A trickling stream of balm most souveraine,”

which gave him strength to arise, and gird on his sword again, and conquer at last. Many a true-hearted man, battling with disappointed hope, has found in work, earnest, faithful, reverent work, the “virtuous balm” which could heal his wounds, and give him fresh courage for the conflict. So had Roger, in the short, sharp fight, whose wounds were upon him even yet. So had Jean, in the longer battle, which, through all her girlhood, she had waged with the dragon-enemy of pain and weakness. And now, their foes dead beneath their feet, what remained for them both but to go cheerily forth to the palace where crowned

rest awaited them? And truly the way was not hard, for once that fight done, the worst of life is over.

Again there had come to that little home under the Minster front the peace of the old days, before Gretchen's presence had first gladdened, and then darkened it. And with the peace, came the fair sweet light of success. Well fought for, well won. And Jean had her little social opportunities now and then with old Canon Boniface and his daughter, or the kindly organist, Mr. Grant, who enjoyed nothing more than a chat behind the creeping plants and crimson curtains of the bow-windowed room. And Roger's work brought him into communication with men of learning and culture, who, coming to Cruxborough to see the now far-famed Woolsthorpe works, found in the young man a bright, intelligent companionship, which they were only too glad to cultivate. So that Mrs. Balmain's prevision-

ary "perhaps" seemed likely before long to sweep over a somewhat extended field of view.

And still after dusk, when his work was done, Mr. Arncliffe would come away from those lonely rooms of his to watch Jean at her carving, or hear her play some quiet, soothing music; and as he took her hand at parting, he would say sometimes, "Bless you, my child!" And then the fair soul which dwelt within those brown eyes would seem to come forth to him, and the two felt that they belonged to each other—that some day all would be well. That was Jean's reward for her fight with the dragon.

People noticed that Mr. Arncliffe did not hold himself quite so erect now, and that the fire was beginning to abate in his keen grey eyes. He had lived a toiling, unluxurious life. Many and many a night he had sat out in the cold, making observations for those wonderful moon pictures of his; many

a day he had given himself neither food nor rest, when he was working at some intricate calculation, or watching the progress of some scientific experiment; and now these things were setting their mark upon him. With a strange tenderness, all the deeper for that she could tell so little of it in words, Jean watched him as through the long summer-time his strength gradually failed.

“If I might only live to see it finished,” he said to Roger one night, as they stood looking at the great telescope, which was slowly growing to perfection under that tent in the courtyard. “I should be glad to go then; at least, I should not mind so much. One ought never to be glad to go out of a world where there is so much to learn. Come, Roger, let us have another walk round it.”

They went. The old man examined every part, tried the different movements,

adjusted the clock-work, and marked its slow, regular circuit.

"I almost think another year will do it, if we can get the second lens cast properly. But if anything should happen, Roger, you understand, don't you?—you could carry the contract through?"

"I should do my best," said Roger, modestly. "I am not afraid. But I hope you will live to finish it yourself."

"I don't know. I have felt lately as if I could not close my thoughts upon it; but maybe, when the cool weather comes, I shall gird up a little."

He walked round again, laid his hand caressingly upon the instrument, as if it had been a living creature.

"A triumph of human intellect," he said at last, slowly and thoughtfully—"a great triumph of human intellect. I am not so proud that I have done it myself as that the thing *can* be done; that is why I rejoice.

Do you remember that other telescope, Roger,—not so fine as this, by a long way, though,—that I was making,—let me see,—eleven years ago, or more, when you were a little lad looking in at those gates, and I showed you over the works ; and when you came to the tent where the great instrument was, you took your cap off to it ?”

Roger smiled, but the tears were in his eyes all the time—tears for the life that had gone, tears for the life that was slowly going, even now.

“I had faith in you from that time, Roger. I felt that you were one of us, a prince of the blood royal. They say it's only a born gentleman who knows what true courtesy is, and so I say it's only a born lover of science who knows what it is to feel a true reverence for what science can do. I call an instrument like that a sort of personification of the human intellect ; and the human intellect is a thing worth taking one's

hat off to, though I never saw a lad do it before. Now we'll go and have a look at that great lens, and then I must go in, I'm tired."

That was the last time old Matthew Arncliffe walked round the courtyard of the Woolsthorpe works. Next day he felt just a little weak, he said, and could only sit in the inner office for an hour or two, looking over a few tables of figures. Next day he thought he would rest all the time.

"Maybe if I give up for awhile, I shall come out fresh again," he said, when Roger came to him for orders. "It's better to stop in time, and give oneself a chance. I wouldn't care, if it were not for those lenses."

But the old man never did come out fresh again. Very slowly and gradually the strength failed out of him. All through the Autumn and Winter time he sat in his little room, waiting for the returning power,

which never came. His brain was clear and bright. He would work sometimes at the necessary calculations, or give directions respecting the work which was being done in the different rooms, or have instruments brought to him for examination, but he never saw the great telescope any more.

“I think,” he said to Roger, when the February days began to lengthen—“I think you’ll have to finish it. It seems to me as if I were getting deeper and deeper into the mud, instead of coming out of it, as Balmain told me I should when the season began to turn. Not that I should have cared if only my work was done; but one likes to wait till pay-day, and then come home and rest. I had reckoned, you know, on going to Paris the Autumn after this next, and seeing it put up in the Observatory. And you should have gone with me. You’ll go by yourself now, most likely. But do your best, lad. Put into it the most perfect

work that can be put. Don't do it for gain, but do it as I would have done it myself, for the love of the thing. Go now. I want you to come to me to-morrow morning, and bring Jean with you."

They came. He was propped up with pillows in his bed, his scientific books and some instruments lying about him; the paper which he had read a few months ago before the Royal Society, on a little table by his side.

"I can't read them, you know," he said, pointing to the books, as he took Jean's hand, and drew her to him; "but I like to see them there. I've been trying to look over that paper, too. I could do it better now, if only I had a year or two longer. There is so much to find out on the subject; and our appliances are so feeble. Maybe my head will be a little clearer by-and-by."

"Don't go out of my sight, Jean," he

continued, as she was moving into the shadow of the curtain. Her voice trembled, her eyes were full of tears, for she saw in his face now what he, lying there so quietly from day to day, perhaps scarcely felt—the slow oncoming of death. “I like to see you. A friend’s smile does me good. What a glorious day! Fetch me my glass, Roger. I should like to have just another look at the sun. It is in my instrument drawer, in the inner office.”

Roger brought it, fixed the dark glass, opened the window, placed the little telescope in the old man’s trembling, feeble hands. He had scarcely strength to hold it.

“Ah!” he said, laying it down after awhile. “That’s a fine cluster of spots passing over the upper limb of the disc. I wish I could have had time for a few more observations, and then to have re-written that paper before they print it in the ‘Transactions;’ but you must give your attention to

the subject, Roger. You will find a few memoranda in one of my desks—we will look them over together some day. There, take the glass away, and leave me with Jean a little while. The rest to-morrow.”

Roger left them. In about half an hour he came back. Matthew Arncliffe lay as if he had slept, his grey head resting on Jean’s shoulder, his hands quietly clasped upon one of hers. But the light upon that grand forehead was “only daylight” now.

She laid him gently back upon the pillow, and as she kissed the folded lips, and reverently covered the dead face of one of England’s great men, she said to herself,

“It might have been.”

CHAPTER XI.

UPON the reading of Mr. Arncliffe's will, it was found that, with the exception of a legacy of two thousand pounds to Jean Monkeston, and some annuities to his work-people, he had left the bulk of his property to Roger.

A fine thing for the young man—a very fine thing, everybody said, and quite what might have been expected under the circumstances. Most likely he would remove to London now, and keep up a regular establishment in Mr. Arncliffe's Wimpole Street house, coming over to Cruxborough occasionally to superintend the works. And in a few months he would marry, and Miss Monkeston would live upon her own and

her mother's property in the little Bishop's Lane house, as comfortable a home as a person in her position could wish to have.

But Roger did nothing of the sort. Everything went on as usual, except that he worked rather harder, and that the grave, thoughtful expression upon his face deepened instead of wearing away, as it should have done when his temporal prospects brightened so wonderfully. And the onslaughts of Cruxborough politeness still found him invulnerable in his steel mail of retirement. Volley after volley was fired in the shape of notes of invitation, calls, cards, or applications for permission to inspect the great telescope. The invitations he declined, the applications he granted most courteously, sending one of the clerks to conduct his visitors over the works, which was not at all what they wanted ; but no Cruxborough drawing-room ever numbered Roger Monkeston amongst its occupants,

and his social intercourse was, as heretofore, almost entirely confined to an occasional raising of hats in the street. Quite enough for him, though, a ten years' apprenticeship to his own society having made him rather independent of that which other people were at last willing to give him.

And so the little world of Cruxborough life went quietly on, until Matthew Arncliffe had been dead a year and a half, and people were beginning to bestir themselves for the next Festival, which was drawing very near. Mr. Grant, Gretchen's kind old Kapellmeister, had been busy for many months over a new Cantata, which was to be performed for the first time on the opening night of the Festival. It was nearly finished now; his choir had been practising the choruses for some weeks past, and he was making arrangements with artists in Germany for the solo parts.

Roger, on his part, had been equally busy

over the great telescope, which was rapidly growing to perfection. The contract was within two months of expiration. At the end of that time he was to go to Paris himself, and superintend the mounting of the instrument; then go on to Berlin to attend some scientific meetings there, and perhaps bring home engagements for further work. Mr. Grant and he had arranged to make the journey together as far as Paris, from which place the Kapellmeister would go on to Leipsic to see the director of the Gewandhaus there, and perhaps engage fresh singers for the Festival.

But other things must come to pass first. For it so chanced that one rainy August afternoon, a dark-eyed, lean-faced woman got out of a third-class carriage at the Cruxborough Station, and set forth with her one little bundle through the narrow streets. There was no welcome awaiting her, neither did it appear of much consequence whither

she directed her steps. Coming past the Woolsthorpe works, she loitered for a moment or two at the iron gates, looking through to the long rows of windows, behind which she could see the machinery working, and the great lathe-bands moving slowly to and fro. As she passed the "Cruxborough Arms," she paused there too, had a few words with one of the waiters, and then went towards the Minster, where the bells were chiming for afternoon prayers. The west door stood open ; the place seemed to offer her its shelter from the dripping rain outside. She was tired with her journey, hungry and worn out ; so she turned in, sat down behind the shadow of an old canopied tomb, and leaning her head on her bundle, was soon fast asleep.

There was a short cut across Cruxborough Minster, from the High Street to that part of the town which opened upon the Portman Road, and of this short cut Mr. Bal-

linger, going home to dinner, happened to be availing himself, when he saw the woman leaning forward, as he first supposed, in an attitude of devotion ; but when he came nearer he found that the spirit of slumber, not of prayer, had taken possession of her.

Now, though Mr. Ballinger's position in the city was at present a somewhat uncomfortable one, and though he was no longer called upon to preside at public meetings, or urge the rising generation to worthy enterprise by holding up to them his own bright example, still there was a little of the old leaven left in him, a lingering remnant of that official dignity which, in the days of his importance, had made him so intolerant of any misconduct in the lower classes. He could not even yet endure to see poverty misbehaving itself without trying to put it in its proper place ; and for a mean, ill-clad woman, with a disreputable-looking bundle on her knee, to be sleeping in Cruxborough

Minster, was an offence almost requiring the arm of the law to be exercised upon it. Coming up to her, therefore, he administered reproof in the shape of an authoritative shake.

“Wake up directly, my good woman, and go about your business. Are you aware that this is a consecrated edifice, and that parties misconducting themselves are liable to prosecution? Leave the place at once, or conform to the regulations enforced by the Dean and Chapter.”

Patch raised herself slowly, opened her great hollow eyes, and faced round upon Mr. Ballinger with a wondering stare; then, as she recognised the familiar features, a sneer curled the corners of her thin lips. But she took up her bundle nevertheless, and said quietly,

“I am going directly; I only came in to shelter from the rain.”

And then she went towards the little east

door, opposite Roger Monkeston's house.

Mr. Ballinger looked after her, took a few steps forward, paused, looked again, turned, and followed her. He remembered the woman only too well, and all the harm that she could work him by making her appearance in the place again. What evil chance had brought her there, now that the affair in which her evidence was required had begun to blow over? How long had she been? Who knew of her return? Something must be done at once, or all the old trouble would have to be gone through a second time.

"My good woman," he said, in somewhat blander tones, laying his hand upon her shoulder, just as she had reached the east door, "will you wait a moment? It strikes me that I have seen your face before."

"Very likely, sir," said Patch, fronting him again with those fearless eyes, in which he seemed now to see a light of scorn. "I

lived servant with old Mr. Armstrong of Wastewood, when you used to come there."

"Ah! yes—in fact, that was what I was endeavouring to recall," said the lawyer, with an appearance of benevolence. "And the world seems to have gone rather hardly with you since then, judging from appearances. Work scarce—times bad, I suppose, for poor people?"

"I don't complain, sir; I am no worse than I was before."

"You have been away some time, I think?"

"Yes, sir, just about three years. I left last Festival."

"Ah! indeed; and have you been here long now?"

"No, sir, I have only just come from the station this afternoon. I am going to try if I can take up the lacquering again at Mr. Arncliffe's works."

An expression of relief passed across Mr.

Ballinger's face, quickly followed by one of dissatisfaction. Patch must not be allowed to take up work again in Cruxborough, if he could help it. She had had time to do no mischief yet; so far all was well. If she could only be got quietly away, before any one knew of her re-appearance, all might continue well. But, things being as they were, the lacquering-room at the Woolsthorpe works was the very last place for her. If management of his could keep her out, she should never enter there. With a well-assumed appearance of concern, he said,

"I am exceedingly sorry. I am afraid you will find you have come on a fruitless errand. Mr. Arncliffe is dead, and the works have passed into other hands."

"Mr. Arncliffe dead, sir?" and Patch's countenance fell. "That is a pity; he was a good master to me. But perhaps I can get work all the same under the new gentleman."

“I fear not, my good woman. The process carried on there now is entirely different. However, as I believe you to be thoroughly honest and trustworthy, I will do what I can to befriend you. I happen to want someone to take care of my branch-office at Woodchurch, a little further north, you know, and I should have no objection to put you into the place, at comfortable wages. You can go at once—to-morrow, if you like; and my office woman here will give you a lodging for to-night.”

“I am much obliged to you, sir; but I don't know that I want to leave Cruxborough. I have had enough of fresh places to last me my life; and I think I had rather settle down where I have been before.”

“Oh! if you like,” said Mr. Ballinger, with an air of leaving the matter entirely in Patch's own hands; “of course I do not wish to influence you. But perhaps you have not considered that the circumstances

of your leaving Cruxborough three years ago were not such as to ensure you immediate occupation now that you have returned. In fact, very unpleasant reports were in circulation, which——”

“I know what you mean, sir; and I’m willing to pay everybody their own before I ask them to trust me again. I can’t do more than that.”

“Certainly not, my good woman,” said Mr. Ballinger, hastily. The subject was rather an unpleasant one to enlarge upon. “But if you take my advice, you will go where suitable occupation is provided for you, instead of idling about here and spending what little money you may have in a useless search for work. If you go on to my office, I will follow you shortly, and talk the matter over with you.”

“I am not going to idle, sir,” said Patch, with her hand on the great iron latch of the old door. “That never was my way. I

have always earned my own living yet, and I will try to do it here in Cruxborough. But I thank you kindly for offering me a place. Maybe if I find I cannot get employment here in a week or two——”

“Oh! no, nothing of that sort. If you do not come at once, it is no use saying anything about it,” Mr. Ballinger replied, hoping to startle his enemy into compliance by the need of immediate action. “I have made you an excellent offer, and I am willing to stand by it, if you are ready for work at once. Otherwise”——for the unlucky man knew well enough that whatever harm Patch could do him might be done as effectually in a few days as during a year’s residence in the place, so that if she stayed at all, the game was a lost one——“otherwise I must withdraw my help, and leave you to shift for yourself.”

Patch stood irresolute for a moment. It seemed more like an hour to Mr. Ballinger,

who felt that his position in Cruxborough depended upon her decision. At last she pulled open the heavy door.

“I am much obliged to you, sir—I will do what I can for myself.”

And with that she went away.

Mr. Ballinger watched to see if she went into Mr. Monkeston's house. It was a great relief to him when she passed it, going down the lane towards the market-place. Something must be done, though. Either he must prevent the woman from remaining in Cruxborough—which appeared unlikely now—or he must contrive to frustrate any evidence which she might bring against him, by collecting facts to prove her of unsound mind. Perhaps that would be the best plan. Three years ago he could have done it easily enough. Almost anyone would have believed him then, if he had raised doubts as to her sanity. Mr. Balmain would have supported him, and the infirm-

ary and union doctors, whom he had helped into their offices by his influence, would, with a hint from him, have given their opinion against her evidence being received in a court of law. Now it would not be quite so easy, but by some means or other it must be done.

And with a clouded brow and an anxious heart, Mr. Ballinger went home to dine with such relish as was possible under the circumstances.

CHAPTER XII.

PATCH crossed the market-place, went into College yard, and walked direct to Mrs. Bratchet's door, which she opened without knock or warning. Mrs. Bratchet was standing behind her table, as usual, getting up a basket of starch things. She rather resented this sudden intrusion upon her privacy, for she was a woman who had her own notions about household rights; and seeing a dilapidated-looking woman with a bundle, standing in the doorway, at first supposed her to be a beggar, or a new servant from some of the hotels, bringing linen for the wash.

"I'll thank you kindly to knock, whoever you may be," she said, "next time you

come. I'm nobbut a poor body, but my house is my castle, for all that ; and it isn't to my likings that folks comes in without so much as with your leave nor by your leave. And maybe you'll tell your errand and get you gone."

"It's your fifteen and sixpence I've brought," said Patch, walking straight to the table, and laying the money down. "I promised to myself I would neither eat bread nor drink water in Cruxborough until I had paid it ; and there's four and sixpence extra, to make up that I have kept it from you so long. That is my errand, and now I will get me gone, as you tell me."

"Mercy on us !" said Mrs. Bratchet, flinging down her iron, "if it isn't Patch come back, as I'm a living woman ; and the money as I never thought to set eyes on no more—no, that I didn't. Well, to be sure ! But there's never no telling."

And she gave Patch such a resonant kiss

as that poor woman had not received for many a day.

“It’s welcome home you are, honey,” she said, “and never a word about nothing as you took, which I won’t say but what it did pinch me a bit at the time, and soap that dear, as it’s fell a good bit since. Get you gone, indeed!—nay, come your ways, and I’ll brew a cup o’ tea, and fettle a slice o’ bacon, and we’ll have it comfortable, as I don’t doubt you’re wanting, by your looks. You’re one of them sort as don’t feed up. Have you come from far?”

Patch had her story to tell, but Mrs. Bratchet was not the first woman to whom she meant to tell it. So she only replied, quietly,

“I have come from London to-day, and farther than that the day before, and I am tired now.”

“I should think you were, too, and a mercy you’re safe landed at last, which

there's a many isn't; and such a talk as never was when you went away, and a many wouldn't have it but what the police was upon you, 'cause of the money; but, says I to 'em, I knows Patch, says I, and she's honest, if she's nothing else. Not but what I was a good bit shook, for it stands to reason, being left that way, and no notice nor nothing, which wasn't what I'd looked for from you; but the fifteen and sixpence proves me as I was right, and you don't need to give me nothing over, for I don't crave it. And so you've come back to settle yourself in Cruxborough again?"

And Mrs. Bratchet swept an armful of things off the hard little sofa, drew it up to the fire before which her linen was airing, took away Patch's bonnet and shawl, and began to "fettle" tea.

"Yes," said Patch, "I like Cruxborough best. I thought I would take up work again with Mr. Arncliffe, but I've heard he's dead."

“Ay, bless him ! He went as quiet as a lamb at the last, but he’d been dwining a good bit afore, and everybody looked for it as it should come. And young Mr. Roger’s got the place now, and a fine thing, too, and carries it on just same ; and right glad he’ll be to get you back, I warrant, for I heard tell of his saying you was a good hand at your work, and kep’ the girls straight, which there’s a many as doesn’t do it.”

“Oh ! then I shall be all right. I will go and ask him first thing. Mr. Ballinger told me the place had passed into other hands, and was carried on quite differently.”

“Mr. Ballinger, indeed !” and Mrs. Bratchet made an expressive grimace—“and where did you happen of Mr. Ballinger, I should like to know ?”

“In the Minster. I was very tired, and it rained, so I went in there to rest, and fell asleep ; and some one shook me up, and

when I looked, it was Mr. Ballinger, and he ordered me out."

"Ordered you out! I should think so! A likely man him to order anybody out. He'd best keep hisself quiet, to my thinking."

"He didn't know who I was at first. Afterwards he came after me, and asked me what I was going to do."

"Did he? Oh! I tell you what, Patch, you're just about the last woman Mr. Ballinger wants in Cruxborough now. He'd rather have your room than your company a great deal."

"He was very good, though," said Patch. "He said he was afraid I should not be taken on again at the works, and he offered me good wages to take care of some offices of his at a place called Woodchurch, farther north, and he wanted me to go directly. He said the place would be ready for me to-morrow, and his office-woman here would take me in for to-night."

“Ay, ay, that’s him. He’d make a straight enough road for you out of Cruxborough, and a comfortable place for you not to want back again. Butter a cat’s paws, if it’s to settle well; and he’d butter ’em thick, trust him. But don’t you be took in, Patch. And didn’t want nobody to set eyes on you—that’s where it is. I can see it as clear as daylight. There’s them in this town, Patch, as says Mr. Ballinger isn’t no better nor a thief and a robber, and it’s my belief they don’t read their lesson backwards way, neither. But reach to, and I’ll tell you it while we have a drop of tea comfortable. It’s well you come to-night, for that’s the last of the bacon, and these here shortcakes is as sweet as nuts. I made ’em myself this morning. Would you like a drop of anything else in it? Say, if you would.”

And Mrs. Bratchet pointed confidentially to the corner cupboard, where she kept her peppermint cordial and a little bottle of

gin, which, to do the good woman justice, was only put into requisition in extreme cases.

“No, thank you ; the tea is best. And I want to hear all about Mr. Ballinger. He is a man I never trusted.”

“And you’d no need to. The story’s easy told. You remember telling me that queer tale about some money as old Hiram Armstrong, of Wastewood, wanted to put upon Mrs. Monkeston, to even it for some wrong he’d done her poor husband?”

“Yes, and you did not believe it. He told me himself he had given the shares to Ballinger, and he was to pay the interest to Mrs. Monkeston, as it was wanted. And I can make you more sure now, for I went to London that night I left you, Mrs. Bratchet, three years ago ; and Mr. Stanley Armstrong was in the same carriage, talking to some one about Roger Monkeston, and he said his uncle had written to him and told him

about it, so it was really so, and that money was the premium which was paid to Mr. Arncliffe. Mr. Arncliffe was in the carriage too, and he could have told you."

"Ay, honey, I've heard all about it. Mr. Arncliffe come here just a bit after, and out with it to Miss Jean, and she sent for me to say what you'd told me, and I overed it all to 'em as clear as I could remember; and Mrs. Monkeston, she never had no money; and there was never a penny come to Mr. Arncliffe for no premium; and they've made it out now as yon Mr. Ballinger, for a nasty varmint as he is, kep' it hisself, and here he's been a-swelling out like a turkey-cock all these years, with what he'd no right to, and the poor missis, bless her, slaving and toiling to make ends meet. I'd wring his neck for him, ay, and that would I, if it was me could do it."

"But can't they make him give the money up, if they know he got it?"

"Maybe they can, if you can get butter out of a dog's mouth, but not without. For you see, honey, Mr. Armstrong he's lost the letter as old Hiram wrote to him about it, and nobody knew Mr. Ballinger were mixed up with nothing, only what you said to me, so as he couldn't be pulled up with the law; and that's why he don't want you here; and he'd trundle you out same way you come, if he could have his will. But I'd stop, if I was you, Patch."

"I mean to," said Patch, decisively. "I shall stop in Cruxborough now until the candle is burnt out."

"That's like you, Patch. You were always such a one for looking on to the far end. But I telled you you'd got a good bit of work to do first."

"Yes, and I have done it," said Patch, with a certain quiet resolution. "I would not have come back here if I had not done it."

“No, you haven’t. You’ve got to do something with your candle first afore it’s burnt out—you’ve got to hold it up to Mr. Ballinger’s wickedness ; and it’s a pity you wasn’t here to do it from the first. I lay Mr. Armstrong won’t rest now while he’s got it all out of you what you know. They do say he’s that mad again Mr. Ballinger, he won’t go near hand them. Folks had set him down to the young lady, but I’ve a notion that ended it ; and he’s wed now to Miss Balmain, as I don’t see there’s much to choose between ’em, for as fond of dress as they are, and thinks of nothing but how they can toss theirselves off. There’s them here says Mrs. Balmain would like young Mr. Roger for her t’other daughter, and axes him over and over, while one might see plain enough what it is she wants ; but he don’t look at nobody, he don’t. I lay he’s a-waiting a better turn. I always used to think as that poor young woman as took

herself off promiscus to be a singer, might have had him if she'd had a mind to it; for, to my knowledge, he was that set upon her, he followed her with his eyes, and would have kissed the very ground she walked upon—ay, and many's the time I've knowed him come home with her from that there music, while as far as the College gate, but never no farther; and he never was the one, wasn't Mr. Roger, to do that sort of way when he didn't mean nothing. But I'm not a woman as talks; and I never let on about it to nobody, not while now. And then to think on her leaving 'em all like that, and never no message, nor nothing, the ungrateful hussy!"

A strange quick light came into Patch's face; but she, too, was not a woman who talked. By-and-by she began to put on her bonnet and shawl, and look round for her bundle.

"Nay, honey, you mustn't go yet. I was

looking for you to stop all night. There's room for us both ; and you won't get a better welcome nowhere."

"Thank you," said Patch. "I'll come back if you like ; but I want to go now and see Mr. Monkeston. I must know if he will give me work again ; and then I shall be content."

So she went away.

"To think on it !" said Mrs. Bratchet, returning to her ironing. "There's a vast more to say. And I've never told her, neither, about the young woman. I lay she don't know nothing about it ; but there's time enough."

CHAPTER XIII.

BEFORE Patch went to the little house under the east front, she turned aside into the Minster Close, and sat upon the steps of the old doorway which had been her resting-place little less than three years ago, when, after that brief, bitter encounter with Notturino, she had wandered out into the cold, and brooded so sadly over a future in which there seemed to be nothing but despair.

Now all was changed; and Patch was changed too. Lean, worn-out, and weary as ever, there was no longer that restless impatience in her manner, no longer that fiery light of unspent anger in her eyes.

Rather she looked like a woman who has done a hard day's work, and now, tired, comes home to rest.

Gretchen was safe. But Mrs. Bratchet's chance gossip had brought up a whole world of thought into Patch's mind. It seemed to explain the sad quietness with which, for many a month after their arrival in Stuttgart, the girl had gone about the lowly duties of her home. Perhaps the love had not been all on Roger's side. Perhaps, through those days of patient, uncomplaining work, Gretchen had been remembering and regretting. Then Patch recalled the touch of pride with which she had said she would never go back to Cruxborough.

"They have forgotten me," she said; "I do now belong to myself."

What did it all mean? And the message which had been sent to Roger Monkeston, asking him to come to the hotel before Gretchen went away, and he never came?

Had that message been given to Notturino, and had it been kept back? For Mrs. Bratchet called her "ungrateful." Poor Gretchen!

For a long time Patch sat thinking there; then she arose and went across to the bow-windowed house. She found only Jean at home; Roger was at the works,—he seldom left them now, except for food and sleep,—and Gurtha had gone out upon some household errand. Jean knew the woman again, for she had come occasionally to the house with messages; but, like Mrs. Bratchet, she associated her chiefly with the Ballinger affair, and her first thought was that she had been sent by Mr. Armstrong, who had long been searching for her, to make some statement about it.

Patch made no long preamble; she knew what she had to do, and she did it. She had to explain the part she had taken in Gretchen's disappearance; to acquit the girl

of ingratitude in leaving her friends, and of faithlessness in keeping them all these years without tidings of her welfare.

“I am the woman,” she said, gravely, entering at once upon the subject in hand, “who used to work in Mr. Arncliffe’s lacquering-room. I have come to tell you about Gretchen Müller. I have seen Mrs. Bratchet. She thinks that Gretchen has been ungrateful to you, that she left you without any message of thanks. I am here to tell you that it is not so. May I go on?”

“What should this woman know?” thought Jean, looking at the gaunt, ungainly figure which darkened her doorway. But she bade her be seated and say what she had to say; only there was a reserve of doubt in her manner which roused Patch’s pride.

“You may think that I do not speak the truth; that does not hurt me. I will tell you all, and afterwards you can find it out for yourself that I am right.”

“It is three years, though, since you went away,” said Jean. “How, then, can you have heard anything?”

“Yes, lady, it is three years since I went away, and I went away the same night that Gretchen Müller did. Mr. Armstrong could tell you that, for I was in the same carriage with him. I had been to the hotel to ask for Gretchen, and they told me she had gone to London with the Signor Notturino; and then I went to the station, but the train was away, and I followed it, and Daniel, the guard, let me in before it left the shunting-point.”

Jean knew the woman had really got in there; Mr. Arncliffe had told them about it.

“Well, go on.”

“At the London station I saw her standing alone. I went up to her, I put my hand on her arm, I said, ‘Gretchen, come with me,’ and she came. For, lady, I feared the Signor. I knew him long ago—that he was

not a good man, and I would not that Gretchen should be with him."

"You might be right," said Jean, still with some coldness, for it was a strange story. "I cannot tell. But why did you not bring her here to us again? We would still have been good to her. Where, then, did you go?"

"Where should a girl go but to the mother who loves her? I knew that the Signor would seek her here early; and I might not be able again to save her. Also, she did not wish to come."

"I can understand that," said Jean. "She knew of my mother's illness, and our need, yet sent no message."

Patch looked baffled, perplexed.

"Lady, she did not know. She knows not now. I will tell you why she did not wish to come, even if it would have been well for her. When the Signor would have her go away so suddenly, she wished

to come to you, and they said there was no time; and then she wrote to you a letter, asking that your brother would go to her, but for one moment, that she might give her farewell to you. And the Signor took the note. I think, lady, he kept it, too."

It was Jean's turn now to look perplexed.

"Go on. Tell me the rest. Where did you go?"

"I took her to Stuttgart, home to her mother, and for some months we lived there; and Gretchen was sad, and she spoke no word, but only patiently did what there was for her to do. And I thought it might be only that her life had closed up from her again, for I knew she wanted much to be a great singer. Also, it might be she remembered those who had been kind to her."

"Then why did she not write to those who had been kind to her, if she remembered them?" said Jean, still wondering, still doubting if this were all the truth.

"It was I who made it so, lady. I wished no one to know whither we had gone. I knew the Signor Notturino, that he would seek her out; and it was likely he would ask for tidings here. It were even better for Gretchen you should think she cared not, than that he should gain power over her once more. Also, Gretchen herself did not wish it, for, as I told you, her heart was wounded, for she thought Mr. Monkeston would not come to her, even for one moment, before she went away. Do you blame her for that she thought so, and when she had written with tears to ask it? However, the child is at peace now."

"She must know all the truth," said Jean, more tenderly, as she began to realize that perhaps after all poor Gretchen had been more sinned against than sinning. "I will think what can be done. And so she lives again quietly at Stuttgart with her mother?"

“No, lady, not there now. For six months we were all there together, and she tried hard to be content, and to do her duty in the little house. But the brightness was going out of her life, for such as she are not made only to work and to work, with nothing beyond it; and it came to her again that restlessness that she should find her own place, and I begged of the good Frau Müller that she would no longer bid the girl be content with knitting stockings, but let her follow her voice that called. And I knew that at Leipsic there was a better school for music; and some friends gave her a letter for the Herr Director, and now she is studying there; and, ah! how she does work; and they all say that one day she will do well. And the brightness has come to her again, and she has a pleasure in her life; and sometimes she promises herself that she will sing in England, and the kind old Kapellmeister of your

cathedral shall hear her, and be pleased with his little pupil. But of you she speaks not ; for the child is proud."

Jean made no answer to that. She was thinking, thinking.

"If music is her life," she said at last, "she must follow it. In no other way will she be happy. It seems as if it might have been better for her to have gone to Naples, and Madame would have been her friend, and made a home for her in London afterwards ; and now that is all over. Are you sure you did well ? What do you know of this Signor Notturino ? I have heard no one else speak ill of him. He has his name, and people say that he is a great artist ; and Madame trusts him."

"So may it be ; but if any woman knows him better than I do, I pity her. But it is over now. A week ago I read in the papers at Leipsic that he is dead. He died far off, somewhere in Russia, where he had

gone to sing. So then I could be at rest, and I came back here, where I have people who know me. Lady," and Patch came straight up to Jean, and looked quietly down into the quaint brown face, whose very plainness shut out the soul that quickened it from sorrow such as herself had known—"lady, that Signor Notturino was my husband. Ah! you look at me, and your eyes say, 'I believe it not.' Well, then, go to that dirty little street in Naples, where the poor people dwell, and ask where the old woman Bianca lived, who had her rose-garden out among the valleys; and some one there, perhaps, will still remember Patchuoli, the flower-girl, who stood with her basket at the door of the great hotel, and they will tell you how sweetly she could sing, and how *un nobil Signor* smiled upon her, and taught her to love him, and married her; and grew tired of her, and threw her away, and went out to a pleasanter life

by himself in the great world which was so proud of him. Patchuoli ought to have curtsied to her fate, poor thing, and gone back to her flower-baskets, since she was not rich enough to take her troubles to the court, as the great ladies do. But no; she wandered away from the place where she had for a little while loved and been happy, and she went to England, and sang in the London streets, until her voice had no more music in it; and some one told her that living was easier in the north country, so she came singing ballads for pence at public-houses by the way to Cruxborough. That was—ah! a long time ago—thirteen or fourteen years ago; and, lady, you know all the rest.”

“Have you told Mrs. Bratchet all this?” said Jean.

“No; it was for you to hear it first. I know her that she is a good-hearted woman, and honest, but she talks too much. I have

told her nothing. I have been there now, to pay the money which I took three years ago, when I went away after Gretchen, but she does not even yet know where I have been all the time. She had but one thing to say to me, and that was about Mr. Balinger, which seemed to me not important. I have seen him, as I came from the station, and he wanted me to go away from Cruxborough, and offered me a place somewhere else ; but I told him it was my will to stay here, and if I can take up work again where I was before, I will do so. That was also one reason why I came to you, for Mrs. Bratchet told me that Mr. Monkeston is now master of the Woolsthorpe works, and I wished to ask him that I might be in the lacquering-room again."

"I will ask him when he comes home to-night. I know he will be glad to have you. Come early to-morrow morning, and I will tell you what he says. For Gretchen

we will wait and consider. You did well that you said nothing of it to Mrs. Bratchet. Be quiet for a little while, until I know what to do. You have been a true friend to her, Patch."

"I have done my duty, lady. I loved her, and I would not she should suffer as I have suffered. Whilst he lived I stayed with her, for I knew not but he might come again; but now she is for ever free, and my life is my own again, and I will finish it here. There is nothing for me but that with much work I should hide all the past."

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CHAPTER XIV.

FOR a long time Jean Monkeston sat there alone in the firelight, trying to find her way through the confused labyrinth of thought which Patch's story had called up around her. That the story was a true one, she did not doubt. A few facts which she already knew confirmed it; and Patch, though a reserved, eccentric woman, had a thoroughly good character for honesty and straightforwardness. The only questionable proceeding of which she had ever been accused, was that sudden flight with poor Mrs. Bratchet's fifteen and sixpence; and even that now was satisfactorily cleared up. Why, then, should she not be trusted for all the rest?

But in what a different light now poor little Gretchen's conduct showed. Jean scarcely knew whether to be more glad that the cloud had at last cleared away from her, or more sorry that for all these years the sweetness of two lives had been spoiled by misunderstanding, for which neither was to blame. But one thing was plain, both Gretchen and Roger must know the truth now. And how they were to learn it, and how the trust, so long withheld, was to be given back again, and how, on either side, the story of hope and disappointment, and final loss of faith, was to be told, Jean questioned herself through all that long, quiet evening, to find out.

At last, as she sat alone, her face began to brighten—that ugly little brown face, which was for her as a shield from life's bitterest sorrow, as well as its intensest joy. Yet who should call it ugly then?—for there had begun to shine out through it the

bright hopefulness of one who sees far off, for those she loves best, the dawning of the day. Roger, coming in very late from the works, almost worn-out with the hard study and toil which were required from him there now, felt a warm glow, as from some unseen presence, fall upon him as he entered the little room. It was like the old times, when Gretchen's smile made sunlight there.

"You have been dreaming happy dreams, little old Jean," he said, drawing her to him, and kissing her as he stretched himself at full length on the sofa. "I suppose a grand new design for wood-carving has come to you, whilst you have been idling here in the firelight. Wood-carving for you; lens-grinding for me. That is the whole story, Jean."

"Not quite, Master Roger. We have each other to love and care for, and I should say that makes rather the best part of the story, at present. The book, you

know, the *real* thing; the wood-carving and the lens-grinding are only the morocco covers, which keep the inside safe and sound. Now, isn't that a grand figure?"

Roger drew her to him—closer still, this sister who had lost so much, who had won in the losing of it that crowned peace which perhaps was better still.

"Jean, you are very good. I wonder the angels do not want to have you. I shall begin to look for the wings soon."

"Oh! no, you need not do anything of the sort. I am not at all ready to go yet. There is a great deal I want to do. First, I want to see something of the world; and by rail one can travel more comfortably without wings. When are you going to Paris, to put up this great telescope of yours?"

"Next month, Jean. Do you want to go, too? I thought you had settled to stay at home?"

“So I had ; but I have unsettled it again. I think I have as good a right as any one to see you put your laurels on—that is, you know, unless you are ashamed of me. Will the crown fit less comfortably if a little brown-faced hunchback helps to put it on?”

Roger’s only reply to that was a kiss, pressed lovingly upon the thin, worn cheek.

“All right, then,” said Jean ; “I have made up my mind to go. You know Mr. Grant has some arrangements to make with the Director of the Gewandhaus at Leipsig, and he and Mrs. Grant are to have a Continental tour on the strength of them, and they have asked me if I could join them. We should all go together as far as Paris, to see your grand ceremonial, Mr. Roger, and then we should leave you to do the rest of your business alone, whilst we took our pleasure in a different direction. I suppose you don’t care to attend the Gewandhaus Concerts, do you?”

“Not I. My singing days are over now.”

“Are they? I think mine mean to keep on all the time. I never felt more like singing in my life than I do just now; indeed, it is nothing but your solemn presence which keeps me from breaking out. It is the prospect of a tour on the Continent which has done it, you know. Little people like me do not get such a treat every day. And to see you taking your place amongst all the grand members of the Académie, and then coming home with ever such a long train of letters to your name. They gave you about half-a-dozen, only the other day, in London. Roger, I do believe by-and-by you will be like those wonderful Australian sheep one reads of in travels, that require a little wagon behind them to carry their tails in. I'm sure you won't be able to walk about comfortably much longer, if things go on in this way.”

But, though Jean laughed, her little hands were trembling all the time, and her eyes only looked bright through the unshed tears which sparkled in them.

Roger, leaning back on his sofa, could not see them. He thought Jean was in a wonderfully happy mood to-night. Mrs. Grant had been in, most likely, talking over this Leipsig visit, and that had put her into such high spirits. Jean was always bright, cheerful and content, but she did not often bubble over into fun and raillery.

“Don’t you take liberties with my caudal appendages,” he said, with a merry pretence of dignity, “or I shall not give you tickets for the coronation. I had three more joints offered me for it this morning. Look here.”

And Roger took out a letter from the President of the Belgian Academy of Sciences, conferring upon him the dignity of Corresponding Member, and inviting him to attend the next meeting at Brussels, for the

purpose of being formally admitted into the society.

“Very grand indeed,” said Jean. “I think the joints appear to grow larger as they increase in number, which is decidedly contrary to all anatomical precedent. You know, they ought to become smaller by degrees, and beautifully less, as the appendage elongates itself. However, let us be thankful for them, in any proportions. Now, if they would only ask you to join the Cruxborough Gentlemen’s Club, what a splendid finish that would be!”

“I should certainly require a wagon then to support my dignity. But, Jean, if you mean to go to Paris with me, you must begin to make your preparations. I must start in little more than a fortnight.”

“All right; I can be ready in that time. Gurtha will look after everything whilst I am away. I have only a dress or two to order. I think I might venture upon that

black velvet mantle which has been looming in the distance such a long time, and a very quiet little bonnet, and,—let me see,—a brown silk dress. Yes, I can fancy myself in a brown silk dress better than anything else. And then something to travel in ; and a suitable toilette, too, for these Gewandhaus Concerts. Dear me ! how things do come up one after another when one begins to think about them. Dress, dress, dress ! What a great deal of money we poor women might have kept in our pockets if Eve had never eaten that apple !”

“Only that most probably you would have had no pockets to put it in, then,” suggested Roger.

“Of course ; I had forgotten that. We must have made purses of our mouths, as the little boys do at the Ragged School. But, Roger, I have something else to tell you. That poor woman, Patch, has come back. Patch,—you remember ?—who

used to work in the lacquering-room."

"Yes, I do remember," said Roger, going back in thought to the old days when Gretchen's voice used to make such sweet music there. "She went away three years ago. And where has she been all the time?"

"In different places. She has been earning her living honestly though, and now she wants to get work again with you. You will take her on, will you not?"

"Yes; she may come to-morrow morning, if she likes. I don't know that she will have just the same place again, for we have another woman over the girls in the lacquering-room; but I will tell the clerk to find her a berth somewhere."

"That is right; she will be glad, poor woman, for she seemed very anxious to be doing something. And I have still another thing to tell you, Roger. She happened to go into the Minster as she came from the station; and she was very tired, and she fell asleep

with her head on her bundle ; and Mr. Ballinger, passing through, saw her, and gave her a shake to wake her, you know."

"Exactly. You would like somebody to do as much for his moral faculties, just now, would you not, Jean? I know you are a downright little Draco about those shares."

"Yes, I should like it very much, and I fancy he will get it before long. But when he had awakened her and found out who she was—for you know he remembered her when she used to live at Wastewood—he was very anxious indeed to get her away from Cruxborough, and offered her a situation at one of his branch offices. That looks as if he were afraid of something, does it not?"

"Poor Ballinger! I think he is paying rather dear for those unfortunate bank shares. He is very welcome to them, though, so far as I am concerned. I would not touch a penny of the money, even if Mr. Armstrong made him pay it over and over again."

“Neither would I, but I should like him to be obliged to disgorge it, all the same. Let it go to some of the charities he was so fond of patronising; that would be an admirable way of appropriating it. Or it might found a Ballinger scholarship in the Blue Coat School. That is a capital idea, Roger, is it not?”

“Don’t be too hard upon him, Jean. You don’t know what he may have had to struggle against.”

“No. But I do know what *we* have had to struggle against, and that is enough. Besides, when a man has done wrong, I like to see him punished for it.”

“Then you may have that satisfaction now. I hear of him sometimes from Mr. Armstrong, and almost everyone has dropped his acquaintance. None of his old friends even go to the house. He has had to form an entirely new set, who are not so particular. Is not that punishment enough, for a man to

feel himself despised where once he was a sort of little king?"

"No, Roger, because it is not a punishment that a man like Ballinger would ever feel. He values his money more than his character; he would rather let all one go, than a penny of the other. I do not call it punishment for a man to lose what he never properly valued. Let him be made to give up the money, and then I will be content; not till then."

"I am more easily satisfied. All I want now is a cup of coffee. Fetch me it, will you, Jean? and then I shall be content; not till then. And we will leave Mr. Ballinger to his own devices."

CHAPTER XV.

PATCH went to her work in the lacquering-room next morning, and might have staid there quietly enough for some time to come, if Mrs. Bratchet, on the occasion of her next clean-linen journey to Waste-wood, had not told young Mrs. Armstrong all about it, with the addition of Mr. Ballinger's great anxiety that the woman should be got out of Cruxborough as soon as possible. And dear Edie, who, besides the indulgence of her own little private grudge against those very stuck-up people in the Portman Road, had now her husband's interests to consider, told him the whole story, and suggested to him that, if he ever intended to bring matters to a crisis, he had better do so at once.

In a few days Patch's return was known all over Cruxborough—at least, over all that part which had made itself acquainted with the particulars of Mr. Ballinger's disgraceful conduct. Mr. Armstrong soon found her out at the Woolsthorpe works, and after hearing her story, and taking a legal opinion, he brought an action against his former friend and entertainer for unlawful detention of property.

Mr. Ballinger was not unprepared for this. He knew well enough what would happen, if Patch could not be quietly conveyed away before anyone heard of her re-appearance. And when he found that his efforts in that direction were baffled by the woman's quiet persistence, he prepared himself for defence in another direction, with what success will appear by-and-by. At any rate, he did not mean to give up those shares without a close fight for them. If the evidence of a vagabond, half-witted

Italian woman was all Mr. Armstrong had to go upon, a verdict might be given in the defendant's favour even yet. Mr. Ballinger buttoned his pockets, rubbed up his hair, and beamed over his spectacles as heretofore, whenever there was an object in the shape of well-conducted obsequious poverty to beam upon.

Mr. Armstrong had applied to Roger, but he declined having anything to do with the affair, for or against. Mrs. Monkeston was a proud woman. Her son had inherited somewhat of her pride; he had been taught to build upon his own foundation, to hew his way to success, not through other people's money, but through his own effort. He had not had time, either, like his sister Jean, to brood over Mr. Ballinger's injustice, until the sense of it was almost touched with bitterness. To be cheated out of a few pounds was not the sorest trouble Roger Monkeston had known. The strong,

purposeful, resolute energy which had helped him to pluck the sting of disappointment, and leave that dragon conquered on the field, could easily throw the lesser crew of petty wrongs under which some men chafe and worry.

Besides, there was no time now to nurse old grudges. His journey to Paris would take him away from the Cruxborough Assizes, so that he was relieved from the troublesome necessity of appearing in Mr. Armstrong's cause. Every day until then would be crowded with duty. The great telescope was already in working order. Several observations had been made with it. Only a few finishing touches were to be added now to the ornamental part of the mounting. For a week before its departure the magnificent instrument held a sort of *levée* in the courtyard of the Woolsthorpe works. Scientific men from all parts of the country came to see it. The Countess

Dowager of Cruxborough made a special journey from her place in Devonshire to pay her respects to it; and after that, it became "the thing" to have had an introduction to the Woolsthorpe telescope. Everyone in Cruxborough who had the least pretension to anything like a position, or who wanted something to talk about during morning calls and dinner-parties, left a card at Mr. Monkeston's office, and requested the favour of admission to the courtyard. Mrs. Balmain and her daughter Gracie were amongst the number, and that good lady made one more vigorous effort, on the strength of her husband's lately-developed astronomical tastes, to draw Roger into the circle of her acquaintance. They should be so delighted if he would come in occasionally. Surely the relaxation of a little agreeable society would refresh him, after such close application to work. Mr. Balmain was nearly always at home in an evening,

and would so enjoy a quiet conversation ; or, if he would prefer meeting a few friends——

But Roger happened to have a foolish prejudice against being picked up again by people who had once dropped him, and Mrs. Balmain's well-meant efforts were for the last time unsuccessful.

Just a fortnight after that dialogue in the bow-windowed room, Mr. and Mrs. Grant, Roger Monkeston and his sister Jean, were on their way to Paris, where they were to remain until after the putting up of the telescope, and the admission of its completer as a member of the Institute of France. From thence he was to go to Brussels, to attend the meetings of the Academy there, whilst Mr. and Mrs. Grant went on their German tour, with Jean for companion—— Jean, so full now of bright, happy purpose, for was not that journey to bring the sunshine back into two lives ?

Roger wrote a very modest account of the Paris doings to his old friend and helper Dr. Boniface, keeping himself as much out of sight as possible, and only dwelling with quiet satisfaction upon the success of Mr. Arncliffe's great work. But Mrs. Grant, a warm-hearted, impulsive little woman, felt no need of such repression, and accordingly sent her own version of the affair, together with a packet of Paris papers, to her friends at Cruxborough.

Next week the usually respectable dullness of the *Chronicle* was enlivened by a flowery description of the triumph achieved by "our talented young fellow-citizen." By-and-by the London scientific journals came dropping in with fuller statements. Special correspondents gave their reports. At the next meeting of the Royal Society, a paper was read on the successful working of this, as yet, the grandest effort of optical and mathematical science, and much credit was

given to the young man upon whom, in consequence of the untimely death of the great astronomer himself, the conduct and completion of the undertaking had devolved. Cruxborough began to look with a dim sort of reverence upon that little house at the top of Bishop's Lane, where so much genius had lain dormant, and to discuss the advisability of a public dinner, as a sort of acknowledgment of merit. A public dinner, and perhaps a piece of plate, for really one must not be behind the times.

Mr. and Mrs. Grant and Jean arrived at Leipsig. The brisk little organist set out at once upon a tour of discovery. Guide-book and umbrella in hand, and with his equally brisk little wife clinging to his arm, he sallied forth to inspect the lions of the fine old town, and see the director of the Gewandhaus Concerts.

Jean's tour of discovery lay in another direction. She hired a carriage and went

out for a couple of miles into the country, towards a little village to which Patch had directed her. Telling the man to wait for her, she took her journey on foot to an old-fashioned timbered cottage, with a vegetable garden in front, an apple orchard on one side, knee-deep now in tall grass, and on the other a wooden Summer-house, whence issued the hum of a spinning-wheel. A peasant woman was passing by.

“Frau Müller?” asked Jean, using for her question almost the only two German words she knew, and pointing to the cottage with a look of inquiry.

“Ja.”

The woman nodded and went her way.

Jean was going towards the Summer-house, when she saw, far off, at the other end of the orchard, the flutter of a white apron, and a sheen of golden curls which could only belong to Gretchen. The girl was coming to the house, with a wooden

pail full of apples, singing as she came, in a clear bright voice, some bars of a song exercise. Catching sight of a stranger in the garden, she stopped. Then, as she recognised the crooked figure and pale face of Jean Monkeston, she started, let fall her pail of apples, and stood perfectly motionless, with eyes down dropped, and lips pressed tightly together.

Jean went up to her. Still she made no movement of welcome—only said very gravely,

“It is, then, the Fräulein Monkeston.”

“Yes,” said Jean, taking her hand, and looking her full in the face with those great honest brown eyes. “You will smile upon me when I have told you all. Gretchen, it is not as you think. We have not forgotten you.”

“I did ask that you should come to me, but for one moment, and you came not,” said the girl, letting her large hands lie

coldly in Jean's clasp ; and there was only a far-away, regretful look in her eyes, touched with a faint flush of pride.

“ You asked, Gretchen, but we never knew that you asked. I have seen Patch ; she has come home and told me all. The cruel Signor never brought to us your little note. He told you a falsehood when he said he was your friend. Roger wanted very much to see you, and he went to the hotel and asked for you, but the Signor Notturino would only take a message. And he said to my brother, when he came back, that you could not see him. That is the last we ever heard of you, Gretchen, until a fortnight ago, when Patch told me all the rest. And you thought we had forgotten, and I come now to tell you we remember.”

A light came over Gretchen's pure young face, like the rose glow of sunshine upon some snow-covered mountain's brow. Gradu-

ally a soul of tenderness awoke in her blue eyes; the lines of the quietly folded lips broke, and quivered into the old sweet smile. She knelt there upon the long grass, and laid her cheek upon Jean's hand, and for awhile she was very still. When she arose, it was the Gretchen of three years ago, only that the simple girlish face was touched now with the tenderness and calm of the woman who has looked sadness in the face, and walked hand in hand with disappointment.

“Come to the *Dannerbaum* and sit down, and let me that I tell you all,” she said, leading Jean to a seat at the other end of the orchard. “But say to me first again that you remember me. And Madame with the good grave^{*} face. Madame who was so kind to me, is she then well?”

Jean laid her little brown hand on Gretchen's knee; on one finger there was a

mourning ring, with a band of grey brown hair set within the pale gold. Gretchen kissed it.

“ I know, then. And the days for you have been dark days. And I was not there to say to you that I loved you. That you have no longer a mother, how sad it is ! And she, too, did think that I forget. But she knows now and she forgives.”

“ It is all right,” said Jean quietly. “ But now tell me of your own life. Tell me why you went away so quickly, and what you have done.”

“ *Ach, Gott !*” and Gretchen shuddered. “ That was a fearful day when I knew I must go ; for there was no time that I should give you my farewell. And Madame said to me that I should write for you a note, and ask that the Herr Monkeston would only for one moment come to me ; and the Signor took it, and I waited patiently ; but he came not, and it was time that I should

go, and the Signor said perhaps it was not the way that in England we do ask people to come to us ; and that I was bold, which made me that I turned away from you in my thoughts, although I could not forget. And there was no longer anything for me to regret, since you did not care, and I went away with him ; but I had no hope. It was not to me good that I went, only that my will had gone. But the good Patch, like a spirit, came to me when we had reached to London, and she bade me that I should follow her, and I staid not to ask anything ; and after a while she brought me to my home at Stuttgart, and there we all lived together, and I was at peace once more, and every door was shut, and no voice called, and none remembered me, and I spun and I knitted, and I did much work, and my mother said to me, ‘Gretchen, thou art a good child.’”

“And you were happy again ?” said Jean,

with a look that was not all of content,
“quite happy?”

Gretchen looked away, out to the blue sky, past the laden apple branches, where the ripening fruit swayed to and fro.

“Is it, then, that we are happy when we spin and knit? Why do we at all have any souls, if that is everything; and why does not the good housemother wind us up with a spring, that we do so much and then go to sleep? I thought you remembered me no more, and you say, was I happy? Can we then be so happy when those we loved want us no more? Ah me! And I could not even write to you! I think it was my pride that I should speak to you of myself no more. I would, though, have written to the good Kapellmeister, but Patch said I must keep quietly there, and that no one should know. And I did wait very patiently, and then it came to me again that I must sing. Once more that was for me

my life. And Patch was very good. She spoke for me to my mother, that we should come here, and my master gave me a letter for the Herr Director, and once more I began to work; and now it is better. And you put from me a great weight when you say that you do remember. It is not then that you think me bold! Ah! but was it not as bad that you think I forget? And your brother, who was so good to me!"

Gretchen's face was turned away still to the blue sky and the drifting white cloud and the laden apple-boughs; but Jean, with love's fine wit, discerned the subtle change which passed over the girl's voice, even as one feels through shut eyelids the coming and going of the light.

"Roger and I live at home by ourselves in the old house. He is the master of the Woolsthorpe works now. Mr. Arncliffe is dead, and has left them to him."

Gretchen's head drooped slightly.

“ Ah ! then he is now one of the great peoples. I do remember so well he said once he was of the little peoples, and I was of the little peoples, too ; and that there was no what you call gulf between us ! Ah ! that is now no longer so. But I do work. I work with very much a spirit, and perhaps one day I shall go where the great singers are, and be one of them. The Herr Director is very good to me ; he says he will one day be proud of me, and then I will bring myself to the Kapellmeister, Herr Grant, and I will say, behold me that I have not forgotten you. All the way to England will I come that he may see me ! ”

“ You need not come so far as that,” said Jean, smiling at the girl’s enthusiasm ; “ Mr. Grant is here in Leipsig. He has come to hear some new voices at the Conservatoire, but he did not think yours would be amongst them. And next month it will

again be the Festival at Cruxborough, and I have a little castle in the air that you shall come home with me, and perhaps Mr. Grant will let you sing there."

"Then will I be content," and a great smile broke over Gretchen's face. "I said to myself that I would once do it. I, the little peasant girl of Stuttgart, shall sing in the great Domkirche, and it will seem to me that I am in heaven. Tell me where is the Kapellmeister?"

"We will go to him soon; but take me first to your mother. I must see her, and ask if she will like for you to go to England with me."

So they went indoors, to the honest old Frau, who left her spinning and curtsied lowly when Gretchen had made her understand who Jean was. And then she brought out bread and honey and garden fruit, and they had a lunch, and Gretchen acted as

interpreter, and told the good mother all about it, after which the girl put on her festa dress and went back with Jean to the town.

CHAPTER XVI.

HALF an hour later there was a great scuffle on the hotel staircase, outside the room where Jean and Gretchen were talking. It was Mr. Grant, tumbling upstairs, three or four steps at a time, as he always did when he was particularly pleased about anything. Jean had just time to push Gretchen behind the window curtains and caution her to keep very still there, when the active little man almost capered into the room, his face beaming over with delighted surprise.

“Ah! Miss Monkeston, what do you think? Here is a piece of news for you. I have found our little singing-bird again.

Such a romance ! That old duenna, Patch, got hold of her somehow, and carried her off to Stuttgart ; and from there they all came to Leipsig, because she could not rest without working at her music. And she has been practising for nearly three years ; and the Director says she is one of his best pupils. I did not hear her, for this is not one of her singing-days ; but I am to go again to-morrow. He wants her to go to London for the Winter season, and he will give her introductions, and she will soon be one of the best concert-singers we have. I mean to carry her off for the Festival—she shall sing the soprano solos in my Cantata. What do you say to that ?”

“Why, that I knew about it a fortnight ago, but I would not tell you, for I wanted to make you a surprise. I told Patch not to say anything. You know, she came back to Cruxborough, and brought us the whole history. And that was why I came to

Leipsig, good Herr Kapellmeister, that I might know it all for myself."

"You little Trappist, never to tell me. I won't stop to talk to you, though, for I'm off directly to the place where she lives. I can't wait until to-morrow to hear her sing."

"I daresay you may hear her now, if you like," said Jean, drawing back the curtain, from which Gretchen came blushing forward.

"I have been to see the Frau Müller this morning, and your little singing-bird came back with me. I wanted to know first if she remembered us. But you will tell Mr. Grant that yourself, will you not, Gretchen?"

"Should it be that I could forget," said the girl, simply, "when you took for me so much trouble that I should learn? The Fräulein Monkeston will presently tell you all, and you will no longer say I am ungrateful. Would you like that I should sing to you now? The Herr Director says I do make much progress."

Without another word, Gretchen went to the piano. All she had to do now was to show Mr. Grant she had not been idle in these years since he lost sight of her. Very quietly, without any concert-room airs and graces, she sat down, and began to sing "*Kennst du das Land*," the song which, three years ago, had made the tears drop from Madame Fortebracchio's bright eyes, when with such sweet unconscious sadness Gretchen told forth in it the story of her own unsatisfied longing. But there was no longing now, no yearning after that which seemed for ever out of reach. Rather the calm, full-voiced music told of a spirit that had found its home in the beautiful art-world, and spoke its own language there, and lived its own life in perfect content.

Jean's honest brown eyes beamed with wonder and delight. Was this indeed the little peasant-girl who used to sing over

her work in the lacquering-room, and come home night after night to the soap-suds and starch-bowls of the good washerwoman's kitchen? For Gretchen's very face and form became transfigured as she spoke to herself in the music. There gathered round her a strange sort of queenliness. One forgot the *Bäuerinn*, with her humble garb and large work-coarsened hands, and remembered only the artist whose proud heritage it was to be at home in the realm of song, and wandering free in that sunny *Citronen-land*, to fling to colder climes the blossoms which she gathered there.

Impulsive little Mrs. Grant hid her face in her pocket-handkerchief, and began to cry. The good Kapellmeister trembled with exultation. He listened through his intellect, as well as through his feelings. He understood, better than either of the others, the mastery which Gretchen had gained over her art, to be able now to make it so per-

fect an interpreter of herself. He realized the hard toil and endeavour which had been put forth to win so fair a result. His little pupil had made her place at last, and deserved all that might be given to her now.

“My child!” he said, kissing her forehead, “you have made me young again. This hour is worth all my journey to Leipsig. I must have you to sing in my Cantata. Ah! I see it,” and he turned to Jean and Mrs. Grant. “Gretchen shall come back with us to Cruxborough. It shall be a great secret; we will say nothing about it to anyone, and at the Festival she shall sing my soprano solos for me. What say you, little one, shall it be so? Will you come?”

“I will,” said Gretchen, quietly, but with a great light in her eyes. “I promised to myself long ago that one day I would sing alone in the Domkirche, and now you have made it for me that I do so.”

“Yes; only that my Cantata is not to be

in the Domkirche, as you call it, but in the Assembly Room, on the opening night of the Festival. However, you shall have your wish too. You shall sing in the Minster on the first Oratorio morning, and I will bring you in myself. We shall make it all right. The Director has been telling me that he wishes you to come to London for the next Winter season, and he will give you introductions, and secure you plenty of engagements. So it will just be that you come a month earlier, and I will take care of you, and you shall stay with me until the Festival is over."

"No, no," said Jean, "you go on too fast. Gretchen and I have settled all that. She is to go back to Cruxborough with me, and be my guest; but I will keep your secret just the same, and I will promise you that until the very last no one shall know who is to sing your soprano solos. Ah! I can see it! How good it will be! Gretchen, are you not glad?"

"I am content," said Gretchen.

So it was all settled. The good Frau Müller was glad to commit her daughter to such safe keeping. The Director gave the necessary certificates, introductions, and recommendations. Mr. and Mrs. Grant and Jean went on their journey, with the understanding that in three weeks they were to return to Leipsig, and then take Gretchen home with them. Roger was still in Brussels. From thence he was to go to Berlin and Weimar, to attend scientific meetings, and perhaps stay some time in London on his way back, so that he would not be in Cruxborough again until after Jean and Gretchen were safely settled there. No fear of Jean revealing Mr. Grant's happy little secret. Her own bright purpose—happier still—lay hidden beneath it. Ah! this home-coming of Roger's, how pleasant it should be!

She arranged the journey so that they reached Cruxborough only the night before

his return. Next morning there was a letter to tell the hour at which he would come. Jean made everything bright and comfortable in the little old parlour, which was now his study. Through it a door opened into what used to be the shop, but now was the general sitting-room, with its screen of ferns and creeping plants in the deep bow-window, its soft crimson draperies, its dainty ornaments of carved wood, its well-worn piano, somewhat the worse for use now, but still able to discourse eloquent music when touched by a skilful hand. Here Jean brought Gretchen, having arrayed her first, not in the identical festa dress of three years ago, for that had been worn out at the Leipsig practisings, but in one exactly like it, which she had insisted upon buying for her before they came away.

“You know I want everything to be just like the old times,” she said, as she helped

Gretchen to dress, and arranged her rippling golden hair, and wove the blue ribbon through it, the blue ribbon which had been folded away so carefully, and looked at so often through a mist of dim, regretful tears. For now that little three months was Gretchen's sweetest memory too. "You must be just the same. Don't alter one single thing. Roger will be so pleased. He does not know you are here at all. I have kept it all as a surprise for him. Shall you be pleased, too, little one?"

"Ah! but," said Gretchen, with a sigh, "perhaps he will not care to remember. Now he does belong to the great peoples; and for me, my mother does knit and spin, and we are very poor."

And there came a wistful look upon her face. Truly that land was fair towards which, in her new art-life, she was journeying; but fairer still was the sunny little island, set so far off in memory's distance.

It was that now, not the old days in the Stuttgart Conservatoire, whose remembrance made Gretchen sad. Perhaps the Herr Monkeston, standing in his place among the great people, would care no longer to reach out his hand to hers, as in the old days. And if not, would the new land any longer be so fair then? When Gretchen thought of singing in the Domkirche, there had always been the companion thought of the Herr Monkeston, listening, perhaps speaking to her through the music, if he ever sang there now as in the old time; and no praise which the good Kapellmeister might give her, no honour or applause which she might win there, would be half so sweet as a single word from the young mechanic who had once, so long ago, held her hand in his, and said, "Stay, Gretchen, stay." And then she had doubted, and then she had not cared, and then other voices were calling, and another light seem-

ed luring her on. Would he care any more to say, "Stay, Gretchen, stay!"

There was a sound of carriage wheels: Roger had come home.

"Wait here, Gretchen, until I come to you again. Do not go away."

And then Jean ran out to meet him. He looked very tired. There were the lines of excitement and anxiety on his face. These last few months had made Roger Monkeston look almost like a middle-aged man, and he was beginning to have that slight stoop which study gives, so different from the upright bearing of his younger days.

"Ah! Jean, but I am glad to be home again!" he said, as she took from him his wraps and bags, and brought him into his own little parlour, where a bright fire was burning, and a kettle singing on the hob, and his dressing-gown and slippers ready for him by the easy-chair. "There is no place like home."

“Not even for a member of the French Institute,” said Jean, gaily, “and an Associate of the Belgian Academy of Sciences. I don’t wonder you are tired, when you have such a load of honours to carry about with you. You know, if people will let the world hear about them, they must take the consequences. Sit down here, and get quite rested, and then you must begin to tell me something.”

“I think it is you who ought to tell me,” said Roger, settling himself down in the great chair—their mother’s chair—whilst Jean drew a stool to his side, and laid her head down on his knee. “You have kept me shamefully in the dark for the last three weeks about your goings-on. Never anything about what you did at Leipsig, or what you heard, or what you saw; and then stealing a march upon me, and getting home first in this way, instead of letting me take care of you from London. What a

wonderfully independent little lady we have become all at once! Why did you not wait for me, and we could both have come together?"

"Because I wanted to get the house ready for you—triumphal arches, and all that sort of thing, you know. And then I thought perhaps you would not care to have a little humpty-dumpty like me trotting about after you amongst your great London friends, and so I came home quietly, and everything is all right now. Do you feel very different, now that people have begun to take so much notice of you? Does it make you just a little bit light-headed—as if, you know, quite another sort of life altogether were getting ready for you—as if something very good were beginning to peep up behind this quiet old Cruxborough life of ours?"

"Jean, you little sprite, you are in one of your mischievous moods to-night. You

ought to have waited for me in London, so that we might have come home together, and then you would have been too tired to tease me, and your eyes would not have been so full of fun. You look as if you were up to all sorts of tricks."

"And so I am. I could begin now, only you must rest and have some tea first, and I want to sit by you and hear about things. First of all, though, I have heard something to-day. Mr. Armstrong has lost his action; a verdict has been given for the defendant. They would not take Patch's evidence, because it was proved that she was of unsound mind; so Ballinger keeps the shares. It is a shame! What is the use of having laws, if they can't take hold of thieves like him? And I daresay, in his capacity of magistrate, he has often enough committed poor people to prison for stealing loaves and turnips."

"Never mind, Jean; let the poor man alone. By-and-by he will find his punish-

ment as heavy as he can bear. I can't feel the least bit of interest about it in any way."

"I don't believe you can. I wonder if I could tell you anything else just now that would wake you up a little?"

"I don't believe you could. I feel as if I had come to the end of everything."

"Poor fellow!" And Jean laid her little brown hand caressingly upon his hot forehead. But her eyes were sparkling all the time, and her voice had a rich ring of gladness in it, which Roger, worn-out and weary, could not understand. It made him almost vexed.

"Jean," he said, turning his forehead away from under her hand, "do let me go to sleep, and don't come to me for ever so long. I don't want tea, or talk, or anything, but only to be let alone. I wish I could go to sleep for a whole month."

And his eyes met hers in a long look, full of bitter meaning. Jean understood. It

was this Festival-time that brought back the old memories. Three years ago life had been so different. He had had so much more to work for, to hope for. It was seldom that Roger touched, even in this slight way, upon the past. Generally it lay buried out of sight ; but to-night he had reached that stage of mental and bodily tiredness when a man's power of self-help gives way, and he wants the touch of a human hand, the sound of a human voice to tell him that he does not stand quite alone in his working or his enduring.

Jean said nothing, only kissed him, a long, quiet, sisterly kiss, and laid her cheek upon his, and then went away, leaving him there alone in the firelight.

It was true. He had come to the end of everything. He was feeling the re-action which follows all great achievements, that terrible panting exhaustion which comes when a great height has been gained.

What was it all worth? He had given himself a great thing to do; he had fulfilled the trust committed to him, and proved himself able to stand in the place which his old master had left. All the way was open to him now. He had not been bidden to tarry, like Matthew Arncliffe, for years and years, knocking at the gate of success, waiting for public recognition. His reward had been paid down to him at once. Comparatively a young man, with most of his life before him, he was already in possession of what a greater than himself, the grand old peasant astronomer, had toiled patiently for until almost the day of his death. No lack of honour now. He might take that richly-certificated name of his into any society, at home or abroad, and be sure of a welcome. He might stand up amongst the most gifted of English and foreign scientific men, and what he said would be listened to with respect. He carried his credentials in the

work which he had done. And what was it all worth?"

Roger looked back through long years to the days of his boyhood, when he used to make telescopes of his mother's cotton reels, and construct three-wheeled orreries with pasteboard and sealing-wax. He traced all the steps by which he had slowly travelled up, at Mr. Arncliffe's side, until, Moses-like, not having entered the promised land, but only beholding it afar off, the old man had died, and left him to finish his journey alone. That promised land was reached now, but, alas! he entered it with Jean only by his side, to gaze with him upon its richness and its beauty. And were even these so very much? Gold medals from the great societies of Paris, Berlin, and Brussels. Ah! but it was not a golden medal he had set before him when, three years ago, he started afresh in the race of life. A more shining guerdon than that had lured him on.

Now the goal was reached, the guerdon gone. He stood on the mountain top, and the land might be very fair, but he was to possess it alone. There was none to whom he could say any more, "Behold, how good it is!"

Roger thrust the medals back into his pocket, turned his face away from the glaring firelight, and slept. He dreamed that he was a mechanic again, with canvas blouse and blackened hands, standing before his bench in the finishing-room; whilst Gretchen, on the other side of the partition, sang one of her little German love-ballads. Then the great bell rang, and the workmen came streaming down the corridors; and he too, hurried away, and by the door of the lacquering-room Gretchen's rosy face laughed out upon him, and her hand touched his in passing, and she looked into his eyes and said—

"Auf Wiedersehen."

Yet still it seemed that a voice, her voice, kept singing on, though she had gone, and the great corridor was empty, and the iron gates were shut. And then he opened his eyes—it was a dream ; no corridor, no finishing-room, no great lathe bands moving to and fro, no buzz of labour, no pant of the toiling engine sending forth its pulse of life through all the mighty machine ; only the little sitting-room again, with its old familiar pictures, and the firelight flashing upon Jean's wood-work ; and up in one corner, on a bracket which she had made for it, his first cotton-reel telescope, that wonderful achievement of his childhood. That had made the dream, that would break it again, for it would not quite go. Still the soft music kept singing on, as he had listened to it years and years ago, a rough-handed mechanic at his lathe ; the same tender old ballad, with its sweet ending of perfect peace—

“Dass uns die Liebe vereint.”

He was awake—surely he was awake, and yet the dream would not break. He waited for the music to die softly out. Instead, it began again—

“Du! du liegst mir am Herzen!”

And the voice, so like hers—nay, sweeter, if that could be. It filled all the haunted chambers of memory. It told over again the dear story of three years ago. It painted afresh the picture which much toil and many cares had dimmed. It overflowed as with a clear crystalline tide the dry rock shores of the past, and every leaf and tress and plume unfolded, and every pebble of jasper and agate which had been lying unwatched there, sparkled into beauty again, and showed like a living jewel in the flood. And still the voice kept singing on; and scarce knowing if he dreamed or waked, Roger rose and went to the open door of the room into which Jean had gone. What more, then, could it be than a dream that Gret-

chen—the blue-eyed, peasant-girl Gretchen, in her festa dress, with the *himmelblau* ribbon gleaming amongst her sunny hair, sat there at the piano? And as, turning, she saw him, a rosy colour flooded all her face, and she came shyly forward, and with eyes down-dropped, and the perfume of the song still breathing from her lips, she said, laying her hands on his—

“The Fräulein Jean has made it that I should come back to you again.”

And how good of the Fräulein Jean to remember, just then, that she must go away to give Gurtha directions about her master's tea.

CHAPTER XVII.

THEN came the Festival again, rousing Cruxborough from its three years' nap ; and flags floated from all the windows, and bells pealed from all the churches, and streams of gaily-dressed people poured through the streets as of yore. But no Madame Fortebracchio, in crimson raiment, smiled upon her admiring public now, and no Notturino skulked after dark into the old College yard, and no Patch, hollow-eyed, prowled about the Assembly Room doors ; and, strangest of all, no one had yet been able to find out who was to sing the soprano solos of Mr. Grant's new Cantata, which was

to be performed on the opening night of the Festival.

Not even the chorus singers, the members of his own class, who had been practising their parts so industriously for the last month. That visit to Leipsig had had something to do with it, they were sure ; but why no name should be announced, and no arrangements published, they should like very much to know. However, Mr. Grant was satisfied, or he would not look so good-tempered, and rub his hands with such infinite complacency when anything was said about the probable success of the performance. As for Mrs. Grant, she was in a perfect ecstasy, told everybody that her husband's Cantata would give the Cruxborough people such a surprise as they had not had for years ; in fact it would be the talk of the city, she was quite sure. All very well, everybody said, it was quite right for a wife to have confidence in her own husband's doings ; but

still it would be better to wait until the thing was really over, especially as nobody knew whom they were going to hear. Surely, if the parts were distributed, and anybody very particular was going to sing the soprano solos, there need not have been such a mystery about it.

Out of respect to the kindly little organist, all Cruxborough went to hear his Cantata. The body ecclesiastical mustered in full force ; Bishop, Dean, Canons, sub-canons, a splendid array of them, in most eligible positions. The body civic too, mayor, corporation, and great city officers, besides regular Festival goers, amateurs, and connoisseurs, who could on no account allow a novelty to be produced without being there to give their opinion about it. Never before, on an opening night, had the Assembly Room been so crowded ; and never before was a conductor welcomed with so hearty a cheer as that which the members of his choir gave

to Mr. Grant, when, *bâton* in hand, he took his place before them, looking somewhat excited perhaps, but bright and resolute and hopeful, as if sure of himself and sure of them, and sure of his audience, and, above all, sure of success.

The overture was gone through perfectly—not a hitch, not a jar anywhere. Then came the recitative and opening solo for tenor voice; then the chorus. After that came a trio for male voices, and then the first soprano air. Who was to sing it? Mr. Grant himself went down to the artists' room, and presently came back, leading a fair-haired young girl, in simple dress of white muslin, neither jewel nor flower nor ornament about her, only a snood of blue ribbon in that shining golden coronal which nature had given her, and which she wore with such unconscious grace. Before at all acknowledging the greeting of the audience, she turned and bowed low to the chorus, as

though recognising in them first her own people, dwellers with her in the land of song. Then with a grave quiet smile she waited to begin.

One moment of absolute, entire silence, then such a noisy burst of welcome as never that old room had listened to before, or any Cruxborough people given. The choir singers soon knew that fair young face again, and their enthusiasm was taken up by the people below, who, if they did not recognise Gretchen, were ready enough to give their homage to the graceful maiden's loveliness. She took it all very quietly. It did not seem to make any difference to her. Only just at first her eyes wandered restlessly over the room, until they alighted on the quiet corner where Jean Monkeston and her brother sat, and then a happy smile broke over her face; she was content.

No fear for Mr. Grant's Cantata now.

Gretchen sang with her whole heart and soul. She seemed to live and move and have her being in the music. She was not content with merely taking the parts allotted to her, but through every chorus her voice rang out; she sang for the love of her work and for her love of the good old Kapellmeister, and a splendid success she made for him. Again and again, when it was over, they recalled her; again and again she came forward, always with him, as though she would not take any praise which he should not share. Her gladness was more for him than for herself.

Cruxborough outdid itself in enthusiasm. A new star had arisen in the firmament of song, and the old cathedral city had been privileged to behold its first appearance above the horizon. A little of the future *prima donna's* fame must always attach itself to the place where her earliest success had been won. Cruxborough might

take credit to itself now as being the patron of genius, the fosterer both of art and science. It had scarcely made up its mind to smile upon Urania with a public dinner and a piece of plate, when lo ! Euterpe came forward to bask in the lustre of its patronage, and add new glory to its annals. Really the place might one day become historical.

“Astonishing, isn’t it ?” said Mrs. Balmain, when the short interval between the Cantata and the miscellaneous selection which was to follow gave an opportunity for friendly chatter. “To think that three years ago she was only a lacquering hand at the Woolsthorpe works. Quite a low sort of person, I should fancy ; but extremely pretty. I remember now, perfectly well, seeing her at the last Festival, and pointing her out to some people who were with me. She was in Mr. Grant’s choir then.”

“You don’t say so !” returned Captain Deveron, who had come across to talk over

the performance; "but I fancy those Woolsthorpe works are going to make us all look rather small." And he glanced into the corner where Roger Monkeston was standing in the midst of a knot of gentlemen, apparently holding a reception, for people kept continually coming and going around him. "I suppose that young fellow will be one of the burning and shining lights now. He quite has his position amongst scientific people in London, and on the Continent can go where he likes and do what he likes."

"Really? how very strange! And he has not the least air of society about him. I always say you can tell people who have been accustomed to do manual work. They never carry themselves like born gentlemen. You can see at once that they are not the real thing."

And Mrs. Balmain looked complacently over into the next seat, to her son Cyril, who, just fresh from College, and never hav-

ing had occasion to obey the apostolic injunction of working with his own hands, might therefore be considered as a specimen, pure and perfect, of the "real thing."

"I wonder the Monkestones don't get into society here," she continued; "one never meets them anywhere. I should have been very glad to have introduced the young man to a few friends, but I daresay he felt he was not cut out for that sort of thing, and you know it makes one feel so awkward when a man does not know what to do. And then scientific people are a great drag in company, they are so dreadful slow. So I dropped it."

Mrs. Balmain made a sudden pause, and stared persistently into empty space, whilst Mrs. Ballinger in *moire antique*, and Matilda in any number of lilac silk flounces, swept magnificently past. The Ballingers had come out a little more into society since the action had been decided in their favour. One or two

of their old set had been to call upon them. They had made vigorous attempts, by means of unlimited dinner-giving, to gather a fresh circle; and having succeeded with a few recent residents in the place, to whom the affair of the Martinet bank shares had not yet been explained, were beginning to assume a little of the old importance.

“Disgusting!” said Mrs. Balmain, shaking her dress before the hindmost flounce of the lilac silk was out of sight; “when every one knows as well as can be that he stole the money, although it could not be proved against him. If anyone could say such a thing of Augustus, I would never show my face in public again; and to see them flaunting about in that way. Of course, you don’t know them now, do you?”

“Not in the least,” answered the Captain.

“We dropped them as soon as the facts came out, though we used to be very intimate. My husband said the dinners he ate

there never agreed with him, and I don't wonder at it now. I can't imagine how you were able to endure it so long, Stanley." And Mrs. Balmain turned to her son-in-law, who was sitting next her, with dear Edie by his side. "But then, I say, it was only like having your own given to you again. You had a better right to it than anyone else. Do you ever see anything of young Monkeston?"

"Only on business, sometimes. I had to go to the works the other week with some commissions from a friend, and I told him Edie and I would be very glad to see him any time; but I fancy he is getting rather too grand for us. You see, when a fellow is patted on the head by lords and dukes, and that sort of people, he can do without us."

"Yes," put in Edie, who had developed now into a pretty young matron, and really looked charming in her wedding silk, "done up" with cerise trimmings; "but you know,

mamma, if we had kept up with them from the first, it would have made all the difference, and Mr. Monkeston such a very presentable young man, too. I am quite sorry, for Gracie's sake, because of course he will be settling soon. He cannot always poke on with his sister in that little bit of a house. It is really wonderful the attention people pay him to-night. Just look, the Bishop has gone up to speak to him now! And who is that gentleman with the light hair, standing beside them?"

Eddie turned to ask Captain Deveron, but that gentleman had moved away when Mrs. Balmain brought her son-in-law into the conversation. Mr. Armstrong was not received in the very best circles of Cruxborough society.

"Gone over to the Benfields! What a nuisance! I wish we had kept him with us—it looks well to have a good set of people about one. Cyril, why did not you manage

to have gone on talking with him? But there is Major Stoner coming—he will be able to tell us. The young gentleman, Major Stoner, with the light hair, standing between the Bishop and Mr. Monkeston?”

The Major levelled his eye-glass in the required direction,

“Oh! that’s the young Earl of Cruxborough—don’t you know him? They say he goes to the works two or three times a week, when the old Countess is at her place here—very fond of astronomy and mathematics, and all that sort of thing, you know. He had young Monkeston out to The Towers this last Summer, I believe, to help him in some of his concerns. They have been putting up a dial in the Italian garden, and the Earl has an observatory, and I don’t know what.”

And then the Major, with a polite bow, moved away to some of his fellow-officers on the other side of the room. Mrs. Bal-

main was all very well, but he did not wish to appear too intimate with the Armstrongs.

“Did you ever hear anything like it?” said Edie to her mamma. “But of course it is only their way of showing kindness. I believe the aristocracy are exceedingly courteous sometimes to that sort of people; but they mean nothing by it. How old Matilda Ballinger begins to look, in spite of her expensive dressing. That silk of hers must have been ten guineas, at the very least.”

“Don’t mention it,” said Mrs. Balmain, loftily. “I haven’t patience with such extravagance. It would serve them right if the bank broke and brought them to nothing. Nobody speaks to them to-night, though. I am very glad of that. Not one of their old set has gone near them. Rather a difference from the last Festival time, when poor Matilda talked so very largely of her prospects, and carried herself as if nothing was good enough for her. You were scarcely

out then, Edie, dear—you don't remember it; but I have no doubt Mrs. Ballinger expected things would turn out very differently. Stanley, the people seem to be dropping away a little just now from Mr. Monkeston. I do wish you would go over and speak to him, and if you can bring him across here for a minute or two, do. It's just as well to appear intimate, and particularly after the Bishop and Lord Cruxborough have been seen speaking to him. He could scarcely refuse, if you asked him, and I must say I should like it. If Augustus was here, he would go directly, but I don't think Cyril has ever even spoken to him."

"It is no use now," said Mr. Armstrong; "he is moving away towards the door. I suppose he is going to offer his congratulations to Mr. Grant and the young lady. I have no doubt he remembers her quite well, if she used to work in the lacquering room when he was a greasy mechanic at his lathe.

Strange, isn't it, that both should have come to the top of the wheel together in this way? There's no telling what may come of it. And such a lovely face, too, as the girl has."

"Pretty, certainly, but nothing more than that; and quite what I should call a low air about her—no style in her manner of carrying herself! So very different from that delightful Madame Fortebracchio! I could have sat before her for an hour, and wished no other treat than simply looking at her, she was always so exquisitely got up. I have never forgotten the point lace she wore at the last Festival. I told Augustus to secure me front seats on purpose to-night—you like to have a good view of the dresses; but, dear me! one might have saved oneself the trouble. A sixpenny white muslin, such as I wouldn't have let you wear, Edie, for even a nursery party. It's perfectly ridiculous!"

And Mrs. Balmain smoothed out her deli-

cate dove-coloured satin, and adjusted her scarlet opera-cloak. The orchestra was beginning to fill again now, and the people were settling down in their places. What a queer thing it would be if young Monkston really did throw himself away upon that German peasant girl, and bring her home to the little bow-windowed house; quite a romance, and, for her own part, she did not think she should object to call upon them. Anyone with a voice was so very useful, sometimes, at an evening party; and most likely, if, as people whispered, she was engaged for the concert season in London,—Mrs. Grant had said so, she understood, to Captain Deveron,—why, her manners might acquire a little more style, and, by the time the wedding came off, she might be quite presentable in society. A curious thing, though, a very curious thing!

“But still, Stanley, when he comes in

again, perhaps before the concert is over, I should like you to try if you cannot get him across to us for a minute or two."

- And Stanley promised he would try.

CHAPTER XVIII.

BUT Roger Monkeston and his sister did not come back any more. They went into the artists' room, where Mr. Grant and little Gretchen were surrounded by the *crème de la crème* of Cruxborough and its neighbourhood. The romantic story of the beautiful young soprano had soon been buzzed about all over the room. Mrs. Grant had whispered it to Captain Deveron after the first solo, and Captain Deveron had whispered it to the Bishop and his party, and from them it had spread in all directions, until, by the time the Cantata was finished, everyone knew that the singer who had assured its success was the little lacquering girl of the Woolsthorpe works.

And if they had been fascinated by her sweet voice, they were still more enslaved—those at least who were fortunate enough to gain admission to the artists' room—by the artless simplicity of her manners, as she stood there receiving the congratulations of the amateurs and professionals and Festival guests who crowded round her. Gretchen was irresistible. The most perfect self-possession, acquired by long experience in the great world of social life, could not have been half so exquisite as the wondering grace with which she received the homage attendant upon her first great success. She had not expected it ; it puzzled and bewildered her. The orchestra was her own place. Singing there, she was at home and forgot everything else ; but all this hum of flattery and compliment, this pressing round her as if she had done some great thing, when she had but told out in her native language the thought that was in

her—what did it mean? Gretchen listened with the prettiest wonder in the world.

“Charming!” said the old Countess of Cruxborough aside to her son, after she had been chatting for five minutes with the fair little singer. “And her broken English is delicious! If she keeps those sweet manners, she will take London by storm. What a thousand pities she has not been trained for the stage! She would make her fortune in two or three seasons.”

And then, after a word or two of congratulation to the composer, my lady swept away to her carriage, leaving Mr. Grant and Gretchen talking over the different parts of the Cantata. The room was thinning now, for the second part of the concert had already begun, but the conductor’s work was done for to-night; he was not going back to the orchestra again.

“I see you keep your old fondness for blue,” he said, lightly touching the ribbon

in Gretchen's hair. "How well I remember your having it just like that three years ago, when Madame Fortebraccio sent for you into the Canon's vestry, and we all thought you looked so pretty."

"It is the same, then," said Gretchen, with a rosy flush upon her cheeks; but that might only be for the Kapellmeister's compliment and the proud satisfaction which he showed in his young pupil. "I have kept it carefully all the time. I do love this ribbon, for it binds me to my old life here, when you were all so good to me. Ah! do I not also remember when I wore it, so long ago? Always will I keep it, for that it is to me like a story which I love to hear."

And she took an end of the ribbon and laid her cheek upon it, with a tender caressing touch. Roger, chatting not far off with a little knot of gentlemen, heard what she said, and his heart beat with fresh hope. Gretchen had never forgotten; Gretchen

had never been untrue. Jean had told him all about everything—how the Signor Noturino had deceived them both, how the poor child had been thinking all these years that they had given over caring for her, how she tried to bear it and be patient, and how she had toiled on through these three years at her music, and won, at last, with neither help nor patronage, to her own place; but through all she had been faithful to the past. Thinking herself unremembered, she had remembered still; and now, standing at the threshold of her beautiful art-life, she cherished the memory of the old days. They were to her even yet “a story which I love to hear.”

Roger stood there after his friends had left him, as if in a dream, looking through the golden gate which those few words of Gretchen's had opened to him, until Jean came up—Jean, who had no place in the congratulations, who was the centre of no

eager knot of admirers, who could only stay in her quiet little corner afar off, and find her brightness in the reflected joy of those she loved.

“It is time for us to go now, Roger. I should think the fly has been waiting ever so long.”

He started ; he had been watching Gretchen as she chatted so brightly and innocently with Mr. Grant. What a pretty picture she made, standing there in front of the crimson draperies, the white muslin dress floating cloud-like round her, the blue-hooded cloak gathered loosely with one hand, her face lighted up with perfect joy and content, as the delighted little Kapellmeister told her how bravely she had done her part. And yet there was all the old simplicity about her. It was the same rich, girlish smile which had flashed out upon him three years ago in the corridor of the Woolsthorpe works—the same free,

fearless maiden grace which had won his heart then, only touched now into the rarer beauty of the artist-woman. It was so like being in the singing-class again to see her standing there, bright-eyed, eager, happy ; just so she used to look as he waited for her at the foot of the stairs, before they had their walk together to the College yard. Almost he could have gone up to her now, and bidden her away, and taken her to Mrs. Bratchet's little kitchen, and then have loitered outside, waiting to hear her voice in the good old woman's evening hymn. And Jean had given it all to him again—Jean, who must sit for ever lonely by her own fireside, nearest, dearest, and best to none.

He took her little brown hand into his. Mr. Grant led Gretchen, and they came away. But it had been noised about in the town that the lacquering-girl had come back, and the men and women from the

Woolsthorpe works had congregated round the doors ; and when they caught sight of the golden curls again and the fair young face, which they knew so well of old, they sent up a shout of welcome, louder, heartier, and longer even than that which had almost shaken the walls of the Assembly Room an hour before. And then some of the more enthusiastic amongst them unharnessed the horses, and insisted upon drawing the carriage themselves ; and some must shake hands with her, and some must speak, and some must have if it were but a smile ; and Patch, keeping away in the background, watched it all, and then sat down on the Minster steps, in the cold and dark, to see the carriage dragged up to the door of the little house at the east front, and Gretchen disappear, amidst cheers, and shouts, and hurrahs, and waving of hats, into the quiet shelter of Roger Monkeston's home.

“ It looks as if that was going to be it,”

said the dark-faced woman to herself, as, when all was still again, she got up to go away. "So there comes the day to one, and the night to another, and at the end of it all we lie down and die."

And with a sigh she turned from the glow she had made for others, to the gloom she had made for herself.

CHAPTER XIX.

NEXT day Gretchen sang the soprano solos of the "Messiah" in the great Domkirche.

Mrs. Bratchet was there, of course. The good woman had only been kept in the dark until the Cantata was safely over, and then Gurtha had been sent to tell her the whole story, and to take her a new dress and bonnet—Gretchen's present—in which to appear at the Festival. The girl would fain have gone first thing in the morning to have seen her old friend, but Jean made her sit still, and take care of her strength for the Oratorio. She would not let her go to see Patch either, nor were they to come

to see her until the afternoon performance was done with ; then Gretchen should sit in state to receive company, the company being a washerwoman and a lacquering-woman, who were to come in for an hour after the Oratorio. What would Cruxborough have said if it had known of the arrangement ?

What would it have said, too, if it could have peeped into the queer old organ loft of the Minster on that second day of the Festival, and seen the guests who, by Mr. Grant's arrangement, had been accommodated with places there ? The guinea people in the front seats of the nave, who saw heads moving behind the screen, thought most likely some highly-favoured aristocrats had been taken there to listen to the performance in perfect privacy ; the Countess of Cruxborough possibly, with the young earl, and perhaps the royal Duke and Duchess, who had expressed their intention of being present at

one of the Oratorios. A mistake entirely. For that was Mrs. Bratchet's new black silk bonnet, which kept bobbing restlessly up and down ; now almost out of sight as the worthy lady's feelings quite overpowered her, and she was fain to subside into a fourpenny pocket-handkerchief ; now stretched forward as far as possible behind the crumbling old pinnacle work, that its owner might catch a sight of the waving flowers and feathers and ribbons below, and far away, beyond them all, the white robes and glistening golden hair of little Gretchen amongst the solo singers. And the tall thin woman, who never stirred once, but sat like a wooden figure far back out of sight, was Patch, who had had a holiday given her on purpose to come to the Festival. And the tiny little person, almost hidden behind a huge panel of Gothic work, was Jean Monkeston ; and the gentleman whom the nave people mistook for a royal Duke or the Earl of Cruxborough,

was none other than a certain young mechanic, whose hands had only within the last three years been purified from touch of engine grease, and who had not yet burned or given away the workman's blouse in which he had stood for many an hour at his bench, an alien and an outcast from all privileges whatsoever of polite society.

“But, law, now to think on it all!” said Mrs. Bratchet, when, after the performance was over, the occupants of the “royal” pew, with the exception of Patch, who preferred strolling about a little, had come across, and were comfortably settled down again in the old-fashioned house at the east end. “How things does turn theirselves round, to be sure, in this here world! To think as I should ever live to see her standing up there like one of the Almighty’s blessed angels, and singing that beautiful while you might have almost took your Bible oath she belonged to ’em. I wouldn’t say it, Miss Jean, if she

was here to listen, but being as she's gone into t'other room to rest herself a bit, bless her! there's no harm to tell what you think, and it beat me, it did, fairly. I could have cried, only for the new bonnet as the sweet creature sent me, and it wouldn't have been luck to ha' spotted the strings first time using of 'em; but them choruses was beautiful. When they all started shouting right up, I could ha' joined in too, if it hadn't been again' the custom, as I'm never a woman that does what isn't proper. Law! Miss Jean, it was almost every bit as good as the 'Glory Hallelujah!' when we get uncommon lively at the prayer meeting, and it isn't in nature you can say for it more than that."

"And for as lovely as she looked too," continued Mrs. Bratchet, who always found great difficulty in coming to a close when she was once launched out into conversation. "Just like a picter. And that blue ribbon in her hair, as she were always such a one

for a bit of blue when she could get it, bless her ! I mind as well as can be yon last Festival, just afore she went away. I seed her with a bit o' ribbon just like that, and what store she did set by it, to be sure, and I couldn't but think as somebody more 'n common had gived it her ; and I axed her, but she sort o' fired up same as she didn't often do, and I made sure there was more in it nor what I saw, and it were as like as two pins to what she had on to-day."

Roger, lying back in the easy-chair, smiled to hear that, and he would perhaps have made willing Mrs. Bratchet say a little more about it, only just then Gretchen came in, in her Festival dress, bright, smiling, happy, with scarcely a touch of tiredness on her young face.

"Ah ! Frau Bratchet," she said, laying her two hands on the old woman's shoulder, and kissing the wrinkled yet kindly old cheeks, "do you then quite forgive me that

I went away from you? It was not I indeed who made it so. And I had much thought of you."

"Forgive you, honey?" and Mrs. Bratchet was obliged to have recourse again to the already tear-soaked handkerchief which had done so much duty at the Festival, "it's me as should ax that, to think as I ever took up a wrong thought again' you, only you see it was with never having a message nor nothing, as it stands to reason one can't see through it all at once, as you may say. And your box left there under the bed, honey, as it's many and many a time one and another of 'em has been at me for to open it out, and sell it for what it would make; but says I, no, it's no business of mine, says I, to go meddling with other folk's things, and maybe some day she'll come back for it herself. And here you are, honey, and there's the box, and you shall have it for the fetching, whenever you've a mind to."

“No, Frau Bratchet, it shall be to you now. I want nothing of all that I had in those years, save only my blue ribbon, which I promised myself I would wear, when in your Domkirche I was at last permitted to sing. All the rest you must have.”

“Why, honey, and is it the very same? Goodness! now, to think what care you must have taken on it. I were telling Miss Jean, a bit since, how I minded of a blue ribbin as you used to set a deal of store by, and it lay strong upon my mind as what it were summut more 'n common, but I didn't——”

“Ah! Frau Bratchet,” said Gretchen, colouring, “but say did you love to hear me sing at the Festival? You have not yet told me anything.”

And the rosy face flashed quickly away into the shadow; not so quickly, though, that Jean, sitting quietly by, failed to see the deepening glow upon it.

“Why, honey, it seems over near hand yet to say what I think about it, but it isn’t often I get more of a start nor what I did last night, when Gurtha come to me and told me you was back again among us, and to sing i’ the Minster this afternoon. And you did right, Miss Jean, not to tell me afore, for I couldn’t have kept it in, no, not if I’d tied my tongue up ever so. And says I, Gurtha, I says, I’ll go hear her, that will I, if I live on bread and cheese a whole week for it, and hev a new dress to my back and all; for you see I’d got a bit of money laid by, with the fifteen and sixpence as Patch brought me, and it as good as lost this nearly three years; and Gurtha she was a bit sly, and didn’t tell me the thick end on it at the first, only miss had come back, and you was all a-going to the music together; and says I, I’ll iron out my Sunday apron, and get a pair o’ new strings to my bonnet, so as nobody shan’t be ashamed of me, and I’ll

manage to slip in somewhere among the back seats, where it don't cost much. And then Gurtha she up and she says, I don't need to spend my money that way, for you was going to treat me; and she kind o' flung it at me, for you see, Miss Jean, she don't like these here musicking places, no, nor ever did, and wouldn't go to 'em herself, not if you was to beg and pray of her to, which is the same with me in a general way, and looks upon 'em as vanity, only it makes a difference when them as you've done for like your own, comes back and you know it's all right; and so says I, well, that fixes it, and there's the bit of ribbin for strings, and I started reckoning what they'd come to, when Gurtha she out with a big parcel, and says she, the young lady's sent you this; and when I come to open it, there was the dress as you see me in it at the present, honey, and my very best duty and service to you for it; and then the

bonnet, so as if I'd picked and chose it my own self it couldn't have been more suitabler to anybody professing godliness; which it isn't right to set oneself out in gay apparel. But black silk there's no one can go against, and takes to pieces, and sponges, and looks as good as new again, so as it'll last me my life-time, if I'm spared. And when they was both spread out afore me, I was that pleased I could have cried my eyes out; and says I to Gurtha, 'Fall to, honey, and we'll have a bit of singing;' and we both on us sang 'Glory Hallelujah!' right through. Ay, Mr. Monkeston, you may laugh, and welcome, but it lifts you up wonderful, does a bit of praise. When I'm happy I sing, and when I'm a bit the other way I kneel me down and pray out loud, and there's generally a blessing comes with it. That's my science, Mr. Roger, and I can see as far with it as you can, with all your fine telescopes and things."

“Very likely, Mrs. Bratchet; there’s a great deal I can’t see with them. But it wasn’t the singing that amused me just now.”

“Then, please, sir, what was it?—for you looked uncommon funny. I’ve seed you look that way many a time, Mr. Roger, when there’s been something to come after it.”

“Well, I was thinking that there will never be silence in heaven for the space of half-an-hour, after you go there.”

Mrs. Bratchet looked puzzled, as if a new theological difficulty had dawned upon her.

“Well, Mr. Roger, I don’t doubt but what I shall keep going pretty well. It’s in me, that’s where it is, and folks must live according to their lights; and I’ve oft thought, when I’ve been set studying by myself, as that must have been an uncommon dull time when the blessed angels was all a-waiting and a-wondering, and never no telling

what was to come next. It's a deal more to my liking where it says they don't rest day nor night. I'm one as wants to be always doing, Mr. Roger, same as yon poor woman, Patch, as you don't never catch her sitting still a minute, only when she's that spent she can't stir herself. And, law, Miss Jean, what a story that is, to be sure, as I could scarce believe my ears when Gurtha told me, and such a-carrying on as she must have had, poor thing, afore it come to that with her as she couldn't live with him no longer. Eh, Miss Jean, but there's some folks gets one thing and some gets another. To think of my old man, now, as there was never a cross word betwixt us, and burying him at the last with a widow's cap and everything proper, as Mrs. Monkeston herself, bless her! give me, for it was when she lived at the Willowmarshes; and a stone put up, as I said he should have it if I starved myself for a year, and the sweet-

est of verses on it you ever saw, and goes to it reg'lar, Miss Jean, on the day as he was took from me, and keeps his few bits of things, ay, and wouldn't part with 'em, no, not if it was for thousands of gold and silver!"

And a tear did drop on the new bonnet-strings, after all, but Mrs. Bratchet wiped it off carefully, and then, turning to Gretchen, set off upon another track.

"They say you're going to London, honey, among all the grand folk, but I lay you won't forget us; and maybe you'll be coming back afore Chresamus time, for it stands to reason you'll like to hear the anthems and all that, as I've heard tell there isn't a place anywhere where they do 'em better nor what they do here, though, to my thinking, it's more to profit when the congregation joins in, same as they do at our chapel; but that's as folks likes it, and there may come a blessing both ways, when there's a willing

spirit and a waiting frame ; not but what I'd a deal rather join in myself, though, for that matter, and couldn't scarce hold still a bit since i' the Minster when the Hallelujah Chorus got agate. Law, Miss Jean, it stirred me up, it did, while I scarce knew where I was, nor what I were doing; and if it hadn't been as the reg'lations went again' it, I could ha' given tongue as loud as any of 'em—ay, and with as good a reason, too, for if there's anybody needsto shout 'Glory Hallelujah!' it's Deborah Bratchet, a sinner saved by grace, and a blessed hope laid up for me, as I'm only waiting and trusting while it all comes true; and my old man yonder, bless him! ready for me, as I seemed to see him as fair as could be up among the angels, when they was a singing 'Worthy is the Lamb,' and him with his crown and his palm-branch, and his white robes, as it isn't a deal longer I'll be kep' away from him now, please the Lord to let me hear the bridegroom's voice,

and go in to the marriage-supper, which 'll be a deal better nor even what the Festival is, and all on us joining in too, same as it can't be i' the Minster. And now, Miss Gretchen, honey——”

And Mrs. Bratchet rose from her seat, and shook out her dress, and stroked down her muslin apron, and pulled her bonnet a little more forward, and taking a glass of wine which Jean had just poured out for her, looked round about upon the little company, and prepared to enter into the solemnities of a set speech.

“ Miss Gretchen, honey——”

“ No, no, good Frau Bratchet, I will not have it so. I like not your ‘ Miss ’—there is to me no sound of home in it—let it still be as in the old time.”

“ Bless you, honey !—I thought that was what you would say, for I knowed you hadn't forgot the old times ; but when I see you set there, just for all the world like a

real picter, wi' that beautiful white muslin, like the wise virgins in the Minster windows, as I've looked at 'em many and many a time, it didn't seem paying proper respect not to make a difference. But as you've give me leave, it shall be just the old way, while I get the right to call you Missis, which, if everybody thought as I do, it wouldn't be a long while first. And so, honey, here's my grateful thanks to you for the gownd and the bonnet"—and Mrs. Bratchet curtsied—"which I'll keep 'em with the greatest of care while my dying day, if I'm spared, and couldn't have been more suitable, not if I'd picked and chose 'em my own self out of all Cruxborough; and health and happiness, and everything else, as the best of well-wishers could ask it for you, and my humble obedience to you, Miss Jean"—and Mrs. Bratchet made a second curtsey,—“and a many thanks for all you've done for me, as it's a good friend you've been, and no

mistake; and your dear mother, bless her, afore you, as never let me want when she had it to give; and Mr. Monkeston, sir"—Mrs. Bratchet curtseyed a third time—"my respect and duty, and a bonnie wife when the time comes, and not far to seek her neither, as I always says don't look into the middle of next week for your mercies, for you'll find 'em nigher hand nor that; and a blessing on your basket and your store, same as you couldn't have it if you was like a many, Mr. Roger, as don't know the difference betwixt their own and other people's—a-scrapin' and a-gatherin'——"

Mrs. Bratchet paused, for just then the door was opened quietly, and Patch looked in.

"Come along, Patch," said Roger, cheerily. "Mrs. Bratchet is drinking our healths, and you are just in time to join her."

"No, thank you, sir, not just now; but I wish you good health, all the same, and

never to want a friend so long as one can do you good. I only thought I would come in to tell you something I've just heard, as I was talking to the waiter at the 'Cruxborough Arms,'—Mr. Ballinger has got his own at last, Martinet's bank has failed, and he is a ruined man."

And, quietly as she had opened it, Patch shut the door, and went away.

There was dead silence for a moment or two. Mrs. Bratchet, as usual, was the first to break it. Taking up her glass, she proceeded with her speech—

"Serve him right ; and if it all come upon hisself, and nobody else hurt, I'd call it a good ending to a bad business. I've lived eight and sixty year come next Candlemas-day, if I'm spared, and I never knew yet but what a man had his vittles brought to him same as he'd cooked 'em ; and I lay now he'll wish he'd stuck to his own kettle. They say stolen broth takes a deal o' mind-

ing, fear it boils over when your back's turned, and that's way with hisn. And now, here's my love and duty again, and the best of blessings to you, every one, and may you live contented, and die respected; and a happy meeting for us all up yonder, with them as is gone before. I can't add no more to that."

And Mrs. Bratchet drank her wine, and then, with a succession of backward curtseys, and many a smile and many a tear chasing each other over her honest old face, she made her way to the door and disappeared, to talk it all over again with Gurtha in the kitchen.

Half an hour later Roger and Gretchen, only those two, stood alone together in the little parlour. Her hands were loosely clasped, the flickering firelight played upon her face, coming and going with the smile which came and went there. But the

deepening glow beneath her downfallen eyelids had kindled itself from the light which never was on land or sea, even the rosy day-dawn of hope fulfilled. One thought, one memory was in both their hearts. Three years ago to-night. Only then they stood out in the cold, and in the dark ; and now the warm, sweet shelter of home was around them. And then Roger whispered, in the loneliness of his life, "Stay, Gretchen, stay !" and she had wandered, phantom-like, away from him into the gloom of that long, dreary silence. But now he called her to him, and she came, in all the white sweetness of her womanhood, a phantom no longer, but the living, breathing companion of his life. And then the bells rang merrily, merrily out, whilst Cruxborough kept holiday under the shadow of its old Cathedral towers ; but now hope's gladder peal kept rhyming, chiming, and changing, rhyming, chiming, and changing ; for a new day had dawned, after the

long twilight of patience, and in these two hearts a new Festival-tide had arisen, whose music was love's everlasting song.

CHAPTER XX.

ALL these things were over and done with, twenty years ago. There is no Festival now in the old city of Cruxborough ; it is dead ; so is Mr. Grant's choir ; so is Mr. Grant ; so is good Dr. Boniface ; so almost is Cruxborough itself, or, at least, it sleeps a sleep which is like to the calm of death.

Patch, too, is gone. The end of her life was, like its course, full of bitterness and pain. She was going too near some of the machinery in the engine-house, and her foot slipped, and she was drawn in amongst the cruel wheels, and there remained no hope of health or healing for her. Roger Monkeston drew her away, crushed, maimed,

bleeding, and she breathed out her life in his arms. She had done much for him ; it was fitting he should do a little for her. People said it was a terrible thing, almost too shocking to think about ; and for a long time afterwards the rough-handed, tender-hearted workmen passed that spot with bated breath. Yet that strong, relentless piece of mechanism, moving from the pulse of life which only men gave it, doing its work, wielding its mighty power alike upon bending steel, or quivering human flesh, was scarce crueller than that other mechanism of a thinking man's selfishness and greed, which had caught the poor creature's soul years and years before, and sucked it slowly, strongly up, and crushed the life out of it ; and then cast it forth to crawl away in its misery whither it would. But if society pitied maimed souls as much as it pities maimed bodies, there would be too many hospitals.

Cruxborough, which, when he was living, extended to Matthew Arncliffe the extremest finger-tip of recognition, has given him, now that he is dead, a statue all of marble. It stands at the entering of the High Street, upon a granite base, whereon are inscribed the great deeds which he had done, the victories which he had achieved over the forces of Nature, the wondrous insight with which he wrung from her her mighty secrets, and gave them to the keeping of science. But whilst the Woolsthorpe works remain where he built them, and whilst those great telescopes of his pierce the mysteries of space, the noble old astronomer needs no monument that skill of man can raise to him.

Jean Monkeston, whom he loved so tenderly, lives on still in the little house by the east front of the Minster, a quiet, peaceful old maid. She has solved her life-problem—a problem difficult, perhaps, as any of

those over which Roger knitted his brows and puzzled his brains in the young years of his manhood. But no Royal Institute has awarded her a medal for the successful working of it, nor have the members of any Imperial Academy asked her to read a paper on the result of her researches. Jean's order of merit, her jewelled star of honour, is the calm, unwrinkled brow which she wears through this, her peaceful afternoon of life. Her style and title, which no herald will ever proclaim, nor any graven marble tell, are only known to the thorn-crowned King, who, perhaps, one day, in other than an earthly court, will read them forth; and the brave, true-hearted, much-enduring little woman will at last find her own place.

Roger lives chiefly in London, where he has made for himself a good name, treading worthily in the footsteps of the grand old man who first opened to him the gate of

success. Sweet Gretchen, happy wife and mother now, is a great favourite with her husband's friends. They chide him sometimes for having plucked so fair a gem from the diadem of art, and placed it where the sunshine of public life can no longer bring out its flashing colours. Gretchen thinks differently. Home light is all she needs to sparkle in. The jewel of her love gleams most brightly at its own fireside. She and Roger were married just a year after her return to England; the wedding was from the little house in Bishop's Lane. The Minster bells rang Roger's festival in and Cruxborough's Festival out, in the same peal; and Gretchen wore, instead of myrtle wreath or orange blossom, the *himmelblau* ribbon which had been her first love-gift, four years before.

They often come back to the old city now, for those great Woolsthorpe works are going on still, and Roger's superintend-

ence is needed for the instruments which are sent out from them all over the world. Mrs. Balmain never sees any engine-grease on Mr. Monkeston's hands, but perhaps that is because, unfortunately for herself, she never comes near enough to have a proper view of them. For Roger is very proud, bows distantly to her in the street, and that is all. Because he goes about amongst such grand people, Mrs. Balmain thinks, dines with dukes and earls at their great London gatherings, and has his name written in the foremost ranks of science. We, who know better, may be allowed to think differently. In the little private office of the Woolsthorpe works, behind a lot of telescope tubes, orrery frames, chronometer cases, and mathematical instruments, hangs a worn-out blouse, which Roger used to wear when he worked at the steam lathe, close to that wooden partition, and which was once quite too discreditable to come between the wind and

Mrs. Balmain's nobility. That blouse keeps him out of society still ; he will cross no threshold which once scorned both it and him. And so now Cruxborough bites its lips for vexation because those Monkestones never ask it to dine with them.

THE END

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NEW PUBLICATIONS.

MESSRS. HURST AND BLACKETT'S

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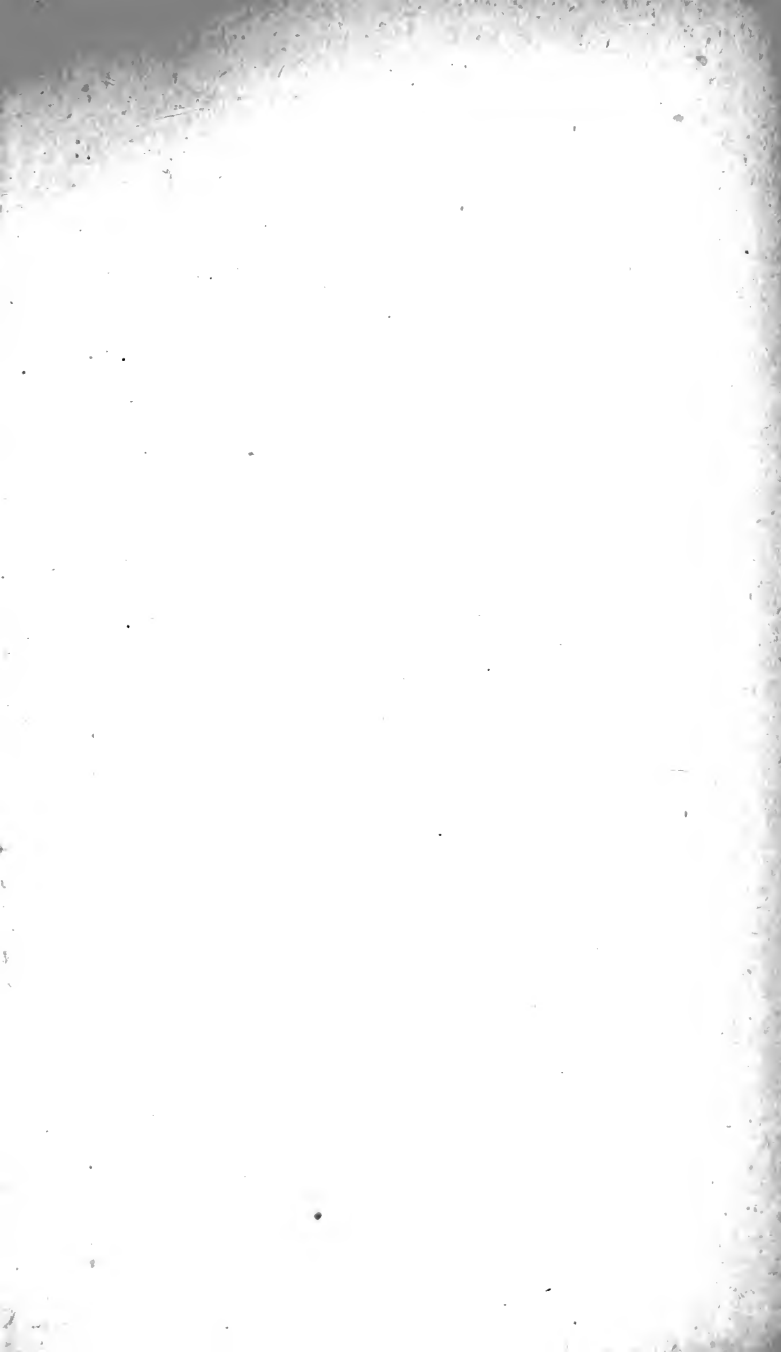
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